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Complete Works

OF

HANNAH MORE.

VOL. III.

WRINGTON CHURCH.
The Burial place of Mrs. Hannah More.

New York.

HARPER & BROTHERS, CLIFF STREET.

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THE

WORKS

OF

HANNAH MORE.

COMPLETE

IN SEVEN VOLUMES.

VOL. III.

CHRISTIAN MORALS.—MORAL SKETCHES.
—REFLECTIONS ON PRAYER.

NEW-YORK:

PUBLISHED BY HARPER & BROTHERS,

NO. 82 CLIFF-STREET.

1843.

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CHRISTIAN MORALS:

BY

HANNAH MORE.

In moral actions, divine law helpeth exceedingly the law of reason to guide a man's life: but in supernatural, it alone guideth. HOOKER.

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PREFACE.

Mr. Pope, in his Essay on Criticism, has asserted, that the "last and greatest art" of literary composition is the "art to blot." With a full conviction of the difficulty and the duty of this art, the Author of the following pages ventures to insist, even in contradiction to this high authority, that there is, in writing, an art still more rare, still more slowly learned, still more reluctantly adopted—*the art to stop.*

But when shall this difficult but valuable art be resorted to? At what precise moment shall we begin to reduce so wholesome a theory to practice? It may be answered—at the period when time may reasonably be suspected to have extinguished the small particle of fire which the fond conceit of the author might tempt him to fancy he once possessed.

But how is he to ascertain this critical moment of extinction? His own eyes, always dim in the discernment of his own faults, may have become quite blind. His friends are too timid, or too tender, to hazard the perilous intimation. If his enemies, always kindly ready to perform this neglected office of friendship, proclaim the unwelcome truth, they are probably not believed. The public, then, who are neither governed by the misleadings of affection, nor influenced by the hostility of hatred, would seem to be the proper arbiters, the court from whose decision there should lie no appeal.

But if, through generous partiality to good intentions, or habitual kindness to long acquaintance, that public, instead of checking, continue to cherish, the efforts which they have been accustomed to indulge, and the author be tempted still to persist in writing, may he not be in imminent danger of wearing out the good-humor of his protectors, by a successive reproduction of himself—of abusing their kindness, by the vapid exhibition of an exhausted intellect?

May the writer of the following pages, without incurring too heavily the imputation of vanity, be permitted to observe that there is a sense in which the favor she has uniformly experienced is honorable to that public who have conferred it?

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Their indulgence has never been purchased by flattery; their support has never been a payment for softening errors that require, not to be qualified, but combated; has never been a reward for incense offered to the passions, for sentiments accommodated to whatever appeared to be defective in any reigning opinion, in any prevailing practice. They have received with approbation unvarnished truth, and even borne with patience bold remonstrance. In return, she is willing to hope, that she has paid them a more substantial respect, by this hazardous sincerity, than if she had endeavored to conciliate their regard by indirect arts and unworthy adulation.

Next to injuring any reader, her deepest regret would be to offend him; but when the questions agitated are of momentous concern, would not disguising truth, or palliating error, be, as to the intention, the worst of injuries, however powerless the writer might be in making a bad intention effectively mischievous? Sincere, therefore, as would be her concern, if any stroke of her pen

Should tend to make one worthy man her foe,

yet the feeling of having contributed to mislead a single youthful mind, by the suppression of a right, or the establishment of a false principle, would be more painful than any censures which an imprudent honesty might draw down upon her.

If the humble work now presented to the world be of little use to the reader, the writer is willing to hope it may not be altogether unprofitable to herself. If it induce her more strenuously to cultivate the habit of rendering speculation practical, if it should dispose her to adopt more cordially what she is so prompt to recommend, she will then have turned to some little account the hours of pain and suffering under which it has been composed.

She does not, however, absurdly presume to plead pain and sufferings as an apology for defects in a work which she was at liberty not to have undertaken; for, with whatever other evils sickness may be chargeable, it imposes on no one the necessity of adding one more to the countless catalogue of indifferent Books.

Barley-Wood, *December* 10, 1812.

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AS

A SLIGHT MEMORIAL

OF

Sincere Esteem and Cordial Friendship,

THIS LITTLE SKETCH

OF

CHRISTIAN MORALS

IS,

WITH STRICT PROPRIETY,

INSCRIBED TO

THE REV. THOMAS GISBORNE,

OF YOXALL LODGE;

In his Writings and in his Life,

A CONSISTENT

CHRISTIAN MORALIST.

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CHRISTIAN MORALS.

CHAP. I.

On the Writers of Pious Books.

All the things in this world carry in them such evident marks of imperfection, are so liable to be infected with error, good is separated from evil by such slight partitions, and the deflection from what is right is so easy, that even undertakings which should seem most exempt from danger are yet insecure in their conduct, and uncertain in their issue. Writing a soundly religious book might seem to put in the claim of an exempt case; but does experience prove that the exemption is infallible? The employment is good, the motive is likely to be pure; the work may be unexceptionable in its tendency and useful in its consequences. But is it always beneficial to the writer in the proportion in which he intends it to be profitable to the reader? Even of the reader, is his own improvement always the leading aim? Does a critical spirit never diminish the benefit which the book was calculated to convey? If he is convinced by the more essential truths it imparts, is not some trivial disagreement of opinion, in a matter on which persons may differ without any charge against the piety of either, made to defeat all the ends of improvement? Is not an insignificant, perhaps an ill-founded objection, suffered to invalidate the merit of the whole work? Is not this eagerly detected fault triumphantly kept in the fore-ground, while all that is valuable is overlooked and its efficacy defeated; the criticism being at once intended to give prominence to the error of the writer and the sagacity of the critic? Another reason is probably searching for brilliancy when he should be looking for truth, or he is only seeking a confirmation of his own opinions, when he should rather have been looking for their correction.

As to the writer, is he not in danger of being absorbed in the mechanical part of his work, till religious composition

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dwindles into a mere secular operation? May he not be diverted from his main object by an over-attention to elegance, to correctness, to ornament; all which indeed are necessary; for if he would benefit he must be read, if he would be read he must please, if he would please he must endeavor to excel; but may he not, in taking some, take too much pains to please, and so become less solicitous to benefit, to the injury both of his reader and himself? May not the very lopping and pruning his work, the flowers which he is anxiously sticking into it, the little decorations with which he is setting off those parts which he fears may be thought dry and dull, raise a sensation in his mind not unlike that which a vain beauty feels in tricking out her person? May he not, by too much confidence in his own powers, be blind to errors obvious to all but himself; or else may he not use the file too assiduously, and by over-labor in smoothing the asperities of his style, diminish the force of his meaning, and polish honest vigor into unprofitable elegance?

Some indeed have been so indulgent to authors under their many difficulties, as to allow them a certain mixture of inferior excitement, as an under help to assist such motives as are most pure. If they did not feel a little too full of their work, when it was under their hand, it has been said, they would not devote to it the full force of their mind. This anxiety, or rather this absorption, it is presumed, lasts no longer than till the immediate object is accomplished. It retreats indeed, but waits for the author, seizes him again with undiminished force on his next undertaking. If he fancied that his former subject was all in all while his mind was intent upon it, that preference, like the fondness of an animal for its young, which is lost when they no longer need its fostering care, is transferred to the next.

As this ardor in a rightly turned mind will not be sufficiently durable to ripen into vanity, but will cool as soon as the end for which it was exerted is answered, it will not materially injure the conscientious writer; for he will probably, when the impetus is taken off, as much undervalue his work, as he had before overrated it. But wofully deficient in humility is that author, whose enthusiasm does not subside, when it is no longer necessary to keep alive the spirit of his undertaking! Convicted indeed will he be of vanity, who persists in thinking his work as glowing, as when, with a judgment dazzled by his ardor, he viewed it hot, and fresh drawn from the furnace!

But perhaps when a man engages in any little service, if

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he did not in some degree exaggerate its value, in his hope of its utility, he would want one motive for attempting it. Is it not therefore a smaller evil that he should a little magnify its importance to his imagination, than that complete hopelessness should totally deter him from all enterprise? Natural indolence is in many too powerful a subduer even of religious exertion, to allow them to work without hope. If hope flatters, she at least supports; thus something is achieved which else would not have been done at all. Again, the timid writer foresees that many objections may be raised to his work. This would amount to a disqualifying dejection, did he not take comfort in the chance that his censors may possibly disagree among themselves as to the points deserving criticism, and that one may even commend what another condemns. Thus his mind is kept in a just equilibrium;—without the expectation of censure he would be vain; without some hope of approbation, even the purity of his intention might not always secure him from despondency.

But though no mixed motives of human feelings in the author ought to interfere with those of the reader, who has only to do with the book, and not with the man, it is of no small moment to himself, that both feelings and motives be pure. It is of the last importance that he do not impose on himself the belief, that he has only the honor of religion at heart, when literary renown, or victory over an adversary, may be the predominating principle. He will also be careful that his best endowments be not converted into implements of injury; he will be cautious that his learning, which is so useful to arm his zeal, do not help to encumber it; that his prudence, which is so necessary to moderate, do not extinguish it.

But if he come off clear from these temptations, other and greater lurk behind. He should bear in mind, that in composing a religious work for the public, he is producing the best part of himself; that he is probably exhibiting himself to others as much better than he is; for whatever be the faults of his own character, it is his bounden duty to conduct his reader to the highest approach to excellence. Independent of his general defects, he is at least carefully keeping out of sight every vain thought which may have stolen upon him while writing, every evil temper which may have assailed him, every temptation to indulge too ardent a wish that his book may procure praise for himself, as well as benefit to his readers. To flatter himself inordinately on this head, as

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well as in over-anticipating the great effects it will produce, is not, perhaps, the smallest of his dangers. That very self-knowledge which he has perhaps been inculcating on others, would preserve him from an undue estimation both of himself and his book.

It was the sneer of a witty, but discouraging satyrist, that, "To mend the world 's a vast design." It is, indeed, a design from which the purity of his motive may not always secure the humility of the author. Yet modestly to aim at ameliorating that little portion of it which lies within his immediate sphere, is a duty out of which he should not be laughed by wits and epigrammatists. Instead of indulging unfounded hopes of improbable effects, the Christian writer will be humbled at the mortifying reflection, what great and extensive evil the most insignificant bad man may effect, while so little comparative good can be accomplished by the best. But it is to be regretted, that even religion is no sure protection against the intrusion of vanity, that it does not always secure its possessor from overrating his own agency, from fondly calculating on the unknown benefits which, by his projected work, he is preparing for mankind. A pious Welsh minister, many years ago, being about to publish a sermon, previously consulted the writer of these pages how many thousand copies he ought to print. He felt not a little shocked at her advising him to reduce his thousands to hundreds; scores she did not dare advise. As she had foreseen, not half a dozen were sold, except a few, charitably taken off his hands by his friends. At her return soon after, from the metropolis, he hastened to her with all the ardor of impatience, and seriously inquired, whether she had observed any material reformation at the court end of the town, since the publication of his discourse.

Among the many unsuspected but salutary checks to the vanity of a pious writer, it will not be the least, that his very popularity may make the intrinsic value of his work questionable; that he may be indebted for its favorable reception, not to its excellencies, but its defects, not to the deep, but to the superficial views he has taken of religion; that it may be more acceptable only because it is less searching; that if he has pleased, it may be owing to his having been more cautious than faithful. If there is reason to suspect that success arises from his having skimmed the surface of truth, when he ought to have penetrated its depths, that he has reconciled the reader to Christianity and to himself by a disingenuous discretion, by trimming between God and the

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world, by concealing truths he ought to have brought forward, or by palliating those he durst not disavow; popularity thus obtained will afford ground of humiliation rather than of triumph. In avoiding these, and all similar errors, he will also not fail to bear in mind, that he who gave the talents, gave also the right bent to the use of them, and that, therefore, he has no more ground for boasting of the application than of the possession.

When he is called upon by the nature of his subject to expatiate strongly on this vice, or to point out the danger of that error, does he never feel a sort of conscious superiority to certain individuals of his acquaintance, who may be infected with either, and, for a moment, be tempted to sit rather in the seat of the scorner, than in that of the counsellor? On such occasions, there is nothing which he will more carefully watch, than the temper of his own mind. When duty compels him to be severe against any false opinion, or wrong practice, he will be cautious not to mix with his just censure any feeling of disdain, any sentiment of indignation, against any individual whom he may bear in mind; nor will he indulge the unworthy wonder how such or such a person will be mortified at the exposure of a fault to which he is addicted. Nor will he harbor in his bosom an uncharitable vehemence against those whom the reproof may suit, nor a secret self-complacent certainty, that if *any thing* can do them good, this must do it; that though they hear not Moses and the prophets, they cannot but listen to his pointed admonitions; that they never can stand out against such persuasions as he has to offer—never resist such arguments as he has prepared for their conviction.

But what is still a more serious danger, has he never been tempted to overlook his own faults while he has been exposing those of others; and this, though the failing he is condemning may be peculiarly his own? With just indignation against the offence he is reproving, has he never once forgotten to mingle tender compassion for the offender, remembering, that he himself is sinful dust and ashes; that he also stands in need of infinite mercy, and has been only rescued by that mercy from being on a level with the worst objects of his just disapprobation?

It would, notwithstanding, be the highest degree of unfairness, to prefer a charge of injustice, hypocrisy, or even inconsistency, against an author, because his life, in some respects, falls short of the strictness of his writings. It is a disparity almost inseparable from this state of frail mortality. He may

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have fallen into errors, and yet deserve to have no heavier charge brought against him than he has brought against others. Infirmity of temper, inequality of mind, a heart, though fearing to offend God, yet not sufficiently dead to the world;—these are the lingering effects of sin imperfectly subdued, in a heart which yet longs, prays, and labors for a complete deliverance from all its corruptions.

When a pious writer treats on any awful topic, he writes under a solemn conviction of its vast importance; he trembles at the idea of not being entirely faithful, of not being valiant for the truth, of not being honestly explicit, of not declaring the whole counsel of God. His own heart is deeply impressed with the dignity of his subject, and he deprecates the thought of shrinking from the boldest avowal of every truth, or of withholding the most powerful enforcement to the practice of every virtue. He is apprehensive lest, on the one hand, when he assails vice or error, he should appear to indulge a violent or vindictive spirit, and be magisterially lifting his fallible self into the chair of authority; lest his attack on the vice might be construed into uncharitableness to the man. On the other hand, he is fearful lest by being more forbearing he should be less upright; lest if he tried to soften he should deceive; lest, by indulging too much a spirit of conciliation, he should compromise truth for human favor. Honest though imperfect, sincere though fallible, he endeavors to bring his principles, his faith, and his convictions, into full operation; he warmly declares what he cordially feels, and faithfully testifies what he firmly believes.

But when he comes to act, he is sometimes brought to be too keenly sensible of the very fault in himself, against which he has been cautioning others; deeply does he lament that he feels strong remains in himself of that corruption against which it was not the less his duty to direct his attacks. Some temptation presses him, some infirmity cleaves to him. These unsubdued frailties prove that he is a man, but they do not prove that he is a hypocrite. The truth is, the religious writer is sometimes thought worse than other men, because his book was considered as a pledge that he should be better. It was expected that the faults he described he would avoid; the passions he had blamed he would suppress; the tempers he had exposed he would have subdued. Perhaps it will commonly be found that the reader had expected too much and the writer had done too little.

The writer on religious topics is however the person who of all others ought to watch himself most narrowly. He has

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given a public pledge of his principles. He has held out a rule, to which, as others will be looking with a critical eye to discover how far his conduct falls short of it, so he should himself constantly bear in mind the elevation of his own standard; and he will be more circumspect from the persuasion, that not only his own character, but that of religion itself, will suffer by his departure from it. The consciousness of the inferiority of his practice to his principles, if those principles are truly scriptural, will furnish him with new motives to humility. The solemn dread lest this inconsistency should be produced against him at the last day, is a fresh incentive to higher exertions, stirs him up to augmented vigilance, quickens him to more intense prayer. He experiences at once the contradictory feeling of dreading to appear better than he really is, by the high tone of piety in his compositions, or of making others worse by lowering that tone in order to bring his professions nearer to the level of his life. Perhaps the most humiliating moment he can ever experience is, when by an accidental glance at some former work he is reminded how little he himself has profited by the very arguments with which he may have successfully combated some error of the reader; when he feels how much his own heart is still under the dominion of that wrong temper of which he has forcibly exposed the turpitude to the conviction of others.

There is, however, no personal reason which could ever justify his holding out an inferior standard. If there is any point in which he eminently excels, he has the best of all possible reasons for pressing it upon others—his own experience of its excellence. If there be any in which he unhappily fails, he is clearly justified in recommending it from the humbling sense of his own deficiency in it. Thus he will in either case enforce truth with equal energy, from causes diametrically opposite. Is it not then obvious that as there is no vanity in insisting on a virtue because the writer possesses it, so there is no hypocrisy in recommending a quality because he himself is destitute of it?

But if, through the so frequently alleged imperfection attached to humanity, Christian writers do not always attain to the excellence they suggest, let us not therefore infer that their principles are defective, their aims low, or their practical attainments mean. Let us not suspect that it is not the endeavor of their life, as much as the desire of their heart, to maintain a conduct which shall not discredit their profession. Above all, let us be cautious of concluding that they do not

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believe what they teach, because they have passions like other men; provided we observe them struggling with those passions, and making a progress in their conquest over them, though that progress be impeded by natural infirmity, though it be obstructed by occasional irritation. The triumphant detecter of the discordance between the author and his book knows not the secret regrets, hears not the fervent prayers, witnesses not the penitential sorrows, which a deep sense of this disagreement produces in the self-abasing heart. To instance in a familiar case:—in the heat of conversation with the author, he has probably marked an impatient word, a hasty expression, a rash judgment; these he treasures up, and produces against him; but he does not hear, in the writer's nightly review of the errors of that day, his self-rebuke for this unsubdued impetuosity, his resolutions against it, the earnest prayer, which perhaps at this moment is carrying forward the gradual subjugation of his temper.

Yet his reputation might suffer in another way; for if the critic could hear these humbling confessions of the writers in question, he would be ready to conclude that they were "sinners above all the Galileans." Whereas the truth most probably is, that they are so alive to the perception of the evil of their own hearts, that things which would be slight faults in the estimation of the accuser, to them appear grave offences. Things which they lament as evils of magnitude, would to the less tender conscience be impalpable, imperceptible. For instance—while the caviller would call even the omission of prayer a venial fault, *they* would call a heartless prayer a sin; where the one would think all was well if the literal performance had not been neglected, the other would be uneasy under the exterior observance, if he felt that the spirit had not accompanied the form. The reprover might even accuse the serious Christian of absurdity, should he have overheard him humbling himself for something which was obviously a virtue. He was not, however, so preposterously humble, as to make the virtue the ground of his regret; he was abasing himself for some vanity, which like an excrescence had grown out of it, some inattention which like a poison had mixed with it. When a humble man meditates on his vices, and an irreligious man on his virtues, the vices of the one might be sometimes deemed about as unsubstantial as the virtues of the other actually are.

The writer of good books, in common with other authors, is exposed to one danger from which other men are more exempt, that of being so immediately the object of his own at-

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tention. This may lead him to be too full of himself. His intellect is even more constantly before his eyes than the form and face of the beauty are before hers. But if in this exercise he may be tempted to think too well of his understanding, the mischief will be counteracted by the advantage which such a close view may bring to his heart. The faults he reprehends in general, will bring his own faults more forcibly before him, and it will be a humbling consideration which he will not fail to press home on himself, to reflect, that he is better able to penetrate into the recesses of the erring hearts of others, from the sympathies of his own. Repeated and successful pains have been taken by some popular wits,* in whom levity has answered the end of malice, to lower the value of pious instruction, by exposing the discrepancy between the exhortation and the exhorter. They have ingeniously invented cases and situations in which the clergyman is preaching powerfully and efficaciously on the duty of submission to the divine will; immediately after which, they contrive to betray him into a paroxysm of overwhelming impatience at some great domestic calamity of his own. This, as it tends to make the infirmity of sincere Christians a matter of triumph, could only have been done with a view to make them ridiculous; a laugh is cheaply though not very honorably raised, and the insignificance or hollowness of religious instruction perhaps indelibly stamped on the mind of the young reader. But supposing the circumstances to have been real, ought the frail affections, ought the conscious infirmity of these good men to have led them to withhold from their audiences the necessity of Christian resignation? Such instances of natural feeling in certain stages of a progressive piety, neither prove religion to be powerless, nor its professor deceitful. Was the fervent, but fallible apostle, who in a moment of infirmity denied his Master, a hypocrite, when he said, "though all the world should be offended, yet will not I?"

Yet is this captious spirit an additional reason why the pious writer should guard against excesses in feeling, which, if the reader could witness, he would exultingly reiterate the vulgar but melancholy truism—*How much easier it is to preach than to practise!* How gladly would he have brought the conduct to confront the counsel, and have missed all the benefit of the discourse, by the disclosure of the failing!

But allowing the worst—granting that the writer is not in

* Goldsmith, Fielding, &c. &c.

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all points exemplary; if we resolve never to read a work of instruction because the author had faults, lord Bacon's inexhaustible mine of intellectual wealth might have still lain unexplored. Luther, the man to whom the Protestant world owes more than to any other uninspired being, might remain unread, because he is said to have wanted the meekness of Melancthon. Even the divine instructions conveyed in the book of Ecclesiastes would have been written in vain.

It is not necessary that the writer under consideration should, like the sacred penmen, criminate himself. Their ingenuous self-abasement added weight to the truth of their general testimony, and was doubtless directed by the Holy Spirit, as well for this purpose, as for the humiliation of the offending historian. But above all it is calculated to show that the renovation of hearts so imperfect was the work of the spirit of God.

Though the pious writer in these days is not called upon to exercise this self-disparaging egotism, yet let not his silence on this head be attributed to a desire that he may be thought a better man than Moses, who heroically perpetuated the memory of that offence which was an inhibition to his entering the land of promise, nor than David, the recorder of his own sins, the enormity of which could only be exceeded by the intensity of his repentance, nor than St. Paul, who published himself to have been a blasphemer and a persecutor. If the best men among us have, through the preventing grace of God, been preserved from the signal offences of prophets and apostles, they will themselves be the foremost to acknowledge how, beyond all comparison, they are below them, in that devotedness of spirit, that contempt of earthly things, and that annihilation of self, which so eminently characterized those inspired servants of God.

But suppose we were to go farther,—even if it could be proved that some individual charge had *not* been altogether unfounded. Even this possible evil in the man would not invalidate the truths he has been teaching. Balaam, though a bad man, prophesied truly. Erasmus, whose piety is almost as doubtful as his wit and learning were unquestionable, yet by throwing both into the right scale, was a valuable instrument in effecting the great work in which he was concerned. Erasmus powerfully assisted the Reformation, though it is not quite so clear that the Reformation essentially benefited Erasmus.

If then the writer advances unanswerable arguments in

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the cause of truth, if he impressively enforces its practical importance, his character, even if defective, should not invalidate his reasoning. Though we allow that even to the reader it is far more satisfactory when the life illustrates the writing, yet we must never bring the conduct of the man as any infallible test of the truth of his doctrine. Allow this, and the reverse of the proposition will be pleaded against us. Take the opposite case. Do we ever produce certain moral qualities which Hobbes, Bayle, Hume, and other sober sceptics possessed, as arguments for adopting their opinions? Do we infer as a necessary consequence, that their sentiments are sound because their lives were not flagitious?

But though it is an awful possibility, that the same work may at once promote God's glory and prove a danger to the instrument that promotes it; that the opulence of the very mind which is advancing religion, may be used by the owner to his hurt; that he may be so absorbed in it as a business that he may lose sight of his end; that he may neglect personal while he is advancing public religion; or be so anxious for the success of his work, that he cannot commit the event to Heaven: let us thankfully profit by the truths he teaches; bless God that he has been useful to us; and pray that his errors may not be imputed to him.

Many a sincere Christian will confess that when he is writing in an animated strain in the cause of religion, there are moments in which, from imbecility of mind or infirmity of body, or failure of animal spirits, while he is promoting the spiritual interests of others, he is inwardly lamenting his own deadness to the very things on which he is insisting. He however perseveres; like the army of Gideon, "faint yet pursuing," he suffers not the feeling to obstruct the act, till, as a reward for his perseverance, the act brings back the feeling. Were it suspected that some of his most approved pages were written under this declension of zeal, what a clamor would be raised against his inconsistency, when his merit, if we dare use the word merit, consists in overcoming the languor of his spirit, and in acting as if he felt it not. His depression may in fact have been augmented by his humility. He has trembled lest the solemnity with which he has been calling upon others should not stir up his own feelings; lest the arguments which were intended to alarm the reader should leave his own heart cold and unaffected.

While it is of the nature of scientific principles to adapt themselves only to one particular bent of mind, and of the inventive powers to address persons of imagination only, it is the

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character of Christianity, and should be the aim of the Christian writer, to accommodate their instructions to every class of society, to every degree of intellect, to every quality of mind, to every cast of temper. Christianity does not interfere with any particular form of study, any political propensity, any professional engagement, any legitimate pursuit. It claims to incorporate itself with the ideas of every intelligent mind which lies open to receive it; it infuses itself, when not repelled, into the character of every individual, as it originally assimilated itself to that of every government, without sacrificing any thing of its specific quality, without requiring any mind of a peculiar make for its reception.

Without altering its properties by any infusions of his own, a judicious writer will always consider how he may render it most acceptable to the capacity of the general recipient. To exclude reason from religion, he knows is not the way to attract argumentative men to inquire into its truth; to exclude elegance from its exhibition, is not the probable method to invite men of taste to speculate on its beauty. If however the writer possess little of the graces which embellish truth, if he cannot adorn it with those charms which, though they add nothing to its lustre, yet attract to its contemplation; still plain sense and unaffected piety may contribute to the production of a work which may prove useful to a large and valuable proportion of readers. But here if genius is not essential, good taste is never to be dispensed with. A sound judgment will be requisite to prevent piety from being repulsive to readers who have been accustomed to view other intellectual subjects exhibited in all the proprieties of which they are severally susceptible. Let them not see a subject of this transcendent importance injured by any debasing mixture, disfigured by any coarseness of language, nor degraded by any vulgar associations.

On the other hand, while some object so strenuously against the introduction of the affections into religion, what are we to understand from it, but that in the opinion of the objectors, a man will write the better because he does not feel his subject; that he will teach religion more safely to others from not having felt its influence on his own heart; that he will make a deeper impression by writing from books than from himself, or rather that making an impression at all is a dangerous thing; that it is of the nature of enthusiasm, proceeding from it, and productive of it; that therefore it is better that the reader should not be impressed, but only informed.

But the sound and sober Christian takes the best precaution

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against infusing a fanatical spirit by not possessing it. He cannot communicate the distemper of which he is not sick. He cautiously avoids it on a double ground. He knows that enthusiasm and superstition are not only mischievous in their nature, but that they furnish the profane with a plausible argument against religion itself. He remembers, and applies the observation, that to some pagan poets, especially Lucretius, these errors supplied atheism with her most powerful arms. But though he allows that enthusiasm is dangerous, he continues to write like one who knows that it is not the exclusive danger of the age; like one who is convinced that phrensy is not the only distemper in our spiritual bills of mortality; like one whose heart is warmed, not by animal pulsation, but by those quickening oracles of truth which carry in them "the demonstration of the spirit and of power;" like one who feels that religion is not a misleading fire, but an animating principle, which at once enlarges his views, elevates his aims, and ennobles his character.

But to return to the reader.—If we had no higher reason to aim at improvement in piety, one would almost think that the mere feelings of gratitude and good-nature might tempt us to show our affection to our pious benefactors, by profiting from their exhortations, their counsels, their persuasions. It might almost touch a heart dead to superior considerations, to reflect how many departed worthies have wasted their strength, as to us, in vain. Among the witnesses who will appear against us in the great day of account, *they* will stand the foremost. Let us tremble as we figure to ourselves our unwilling accusers in that band of holy men, who earnestly sought to draw us, not to themselves, but to those treasures of inspiration, of which they were the faithful expositors; to the prophets and apostles,—"to Jesus the mediator of the new covenant, and to God the judge of all."

And is it not a cruel return to refuse those who still meekly wait the effect of their labors upon earth, the honest gratification of seeing that we have derived some little advantage from their exertions? Let us show them that they have not offered up the fervent prayers which doubtless accompanied their unwearied labors to no end. While so many saints are now rejoicing in heaven, in the society of those whom their holy labors were made instrumental in bringing thither; let us not give those who are still zealously devoting their talents to the same glorious purpose upon earth, sad cause to lament the total inefficacy of their endeavors—to regret that they are sent to them who will not hear, or who remain as

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if they had not heard—to suspect that if we do give them a patient hearing, it is for the sake of their style, their rhetoric, their good taste; but that when their eloquence opposes our corruptions, when their arguments cross our inclinations, when their persuasions trench upon our passions, or their remonstrances interfere with our vanity, we are insensible to the voice of the charmer; or if we forgive their piety for the sake of their talents, we seldom go further than forgiveness.

CHAP. II.

On Providence.

It is not easy to conceive a more deplorable state of mind, than to live in a disbelief of God's providential government of the world. To be threatened with troubles, and to see no power which can avert them; to be surrounded with sorrows, and discern no hand which can redress them; to labor under oppression or calumny, and believe there is no friend to relieve, and no judge to vindicate us; to live in a world, of which we believe its ruler has abdicated the throne, or delegated the direction to chance; to suspect that he has made over the triumph to injustice, and the victory to impiety; to suppose that we are abandoned to the casualties of nature, and the domination of wickedness; to behold the earth a scene of disorder, with no superintendent to regulate it; to hear the storms beating, and see the tempests spreading desolation around, with no influence to direct, and no wisdom to control them: all this would render human life a burden intolerable to human feeling. Even a heathen, in one of those glimpses of illumination which they seemed occasionally to catch, could say, *it would not be worth while to live in a world which was not governed by Providence.*

But as soon as we clearly discern the mind which appoints, and the hand which governs, all events, we begin to see our way through them: as soon as we are brought to recognise God's authority, and to confide in his goodness, we can say to our unruly hearts, what he said to the tempestuous waves, *Peace, be still.* Though all is perplexity, we know who can reduce confusion into order: once assured of the protection of the Supreme Intelligence, we shall possess our souls in patience, and resign our will with submission. As soon as this conviction is fully established, we become persuaded

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that a being of infinite love would never have placed us in a scene beset with so many trials, and exposed to so many dangers, had he not intended them as necessary materials by which, under his guidance, we are to work out our future happiness; as so many warnings not to set up our rest here; as so many incentives to draw us on in pursuit of that better state to which eternal mercy is conducting us through this thorny way.

To keep God habitually in view, as the end of all our aims, and the disposer of all events—to see him in all our comforts, to admire the benignity with which he imparts them—to adore the same substantial, though less obvious mercy, in our afflictions—to acknowledge at once the unwillingness with which he dispenses our trials, and the necessity of our suffering them—to view him in his bounties of creation, with a love which makes every creature pleasant—to regard him in his providential direction with a confidence which makes every hardship supportable—to observe the subserviency of events to his eternal purposes: all this solves difficulties otherwise insuperable, vindicates the divine conduct, composes the intractable passions, settles the wavering faith, and quickens the too reluctant gratitude.

The fabled charioteer, who usurped his father's empire for a day, is not more illustrative of *their* presumption, who, virtually snatching the reins of government from God, would involve the earth in confusion and ruin, than the denial which the ambitious supplicant received to his mad request, is applicable to the goodness of God in refusing to delegate his power to his creatures: *My son, the very tenderness I show in denying so ruinous a petition, is the surest proof that I am indeed thy father.*

Sounds to which we are accustomed, we fancy have a definite sense. But we often fancy it unjustly; for familiarity alone cannot give meaning to what is in itself unintelligible. Thus many words, without any determinate and precise meaning, pass current in common discourse. Some talk of those chimerical beings, nature, fate, chance, and necessity, as positively as if they had a real existence, and of almighty power and direction as if they had none.

In speaking of ordinary events as fortuitous, or as natural, we dispossess Providence of one half of his dominion. We assign to him the credit of great and avowedly supernatural operations, because we know not how else to dispose of them. For instance: we ascribe to him power and wisdom in the creation of the world, while we talk as if we thought the

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keeping it in order might be effected by an inferior agency. We sometimes speak as if we assigned the government of the world to two distinct beings: whatever is awful only, and out of the common course, we ascribe to God, as revolutions, volcanoes, earthquakes. We think the dial of Ahaz going backward, the sun stationary on Gibeon, marvels worthy of Omnipotence: but when we stop here, is it not virtually saying, that to maintain invariable order, unbroken regularity, perpetual uniformity, and systematic beauty in the heavens and the earth, does not exhibit equally striking proofs of infinite superintendence.

Many seem to ascribe to chance the common circumstances of life, as if they thought it would be an affront to the Almighty to refer them to him; as if it were unbecoming his dignity to order the affairs of beings whom he thought it no derogation of that dignity to create. It looks as if, while we were obliged to him for making us, we would not wish to encumber him with the care of us. But the gracious Father of the universal family thinks it no dishonor to watch over the concerns, to supply the wants, and dispose the lot of creatures who owe their existence to his power, and their redemption to his mercy. He did not create his rational subjects in order to neglect them, or to turn them over to another, a capricious, an imaginary power.

We do not, it is true, so much arraign his general providence, as his particular appointments. We will allow the world to be nominally his, if he will allow us our opinion in respect to his management of certain parts of it. Now, that he should not put forth the same specific energy individually to direct as to create, is supposing an anomaly in the character of the all-perfect God. Whatever was his design in the formation of the world and its inhabitants, the same reason would, beyond a doubt, influence him in their superintendence and preservation. David, in describing the simple grandeur of omnipotent benignity, sets us a beautiful pattern. He does not represent the belief of God's providential care as an effort, but describes our continual sustenance as the necessary, unlabored effect of infinite power and goodness. *He openeth his hand, and filleth all things living with plenteousness;* thus making our blessings rather, as it were, a result, than an operation.

And as we are not under the divided control of a greater and a subordinate power, so neither are we, as the Persian mythology teaches, the subjects of two equal beings, each of whom distributes respectively good and evil according to

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his peculiar character and province. Nor are we the sport of the conflicting atoms of one school, nor of the fatal necessity of another. There is one omnipotent, omniscient, perfect, supreme Intelligence, who disposes of every person and of every thing according to the counsel of his own infinitely holy will. "The help that is done upon earth, God doth it himself." The comprehensive mind, enlightened by Christian faith, discovers the same harmony and design in the course of human events, as the philosopher perceives in the movements of the material system.

Without a thorough conviction of this most consolatory doctrine, what can we make of the events which are now passing before our eyes? What can we say to the perplexed state of an almost desolated world? There is no way of disentangling the confusion but by seeing God in every thing. Not to adore his providence as having some grand scheme which he is carrying on, some remote beneficial end in view, some unrevealed design to accomplish, by means not only inscrutable but seemingly contradictory, is practical atheism. To contemplate the events which distract the civilized world, the tyranny which tears up order and morality by the roots; to behold the calamities of some, the crimes of others—such blackness gathering over the heads of some countries, such tempests bursting over those of others—these scenes must subvert the faith, must extinguish the hope, of all who do not firmly believe that the same power which "stilleth the raging of the sea and the noise of the waves," can in his own good time also still *the madness of the people;* will in his appointed season enable us to say, "And where is the fury of the oppressor?" He may, and we know not how soon, enable us to ask, "Where is the man that made the earth to tremble—that did shake kingdoms—that made the world as a wilderness—that destroyed the cities thereof—that opened not the house of his prisoners?" Yes, disorganized as the state of the world appears to be, let us be assured that it is not turned adrift, that things are not left to go on at random. Though the people are rebellious, the Sovereign has not renounced his dominion over them. The most oppressive and destructive agents are his mysterious ministers; they are carrying on, though unconsciously, his universal plan—a plan which, though complicated, is consistent; though apparently disorderly, will be found finally harmonious.

In some pieces of mechanism we have observed different artists employed in different branches of the same machinery:

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in this division of labor, each man performs his allotted portion, in utter ignorance perhaps, not only of the portions assigned to the others, but also of the ultimate application of his own. Busy in executing his single pin, or spring, or wheel, it is no part of his concern to understand the work assigned to others, still less to comprehend the scheme of the master. But though the workman is ignorant how the whole is to be arranged, the machine would have been incomplete without his seemingly inconsiderable contribution. In the mean time the master unites, by apt junctures and articulations, parts which were not known to be susceptible of connection; combines the separate divisions without difficulty, because the several workmen have only been individually helping to accomplish the original plan which had previously existed in his inventive mind.

The prescience of God is among his peculiarly incommunicable attributes. Happy is it for us indeed that it *is* incommunicable, for if any portion of it were imparted to us, how inconceivably would the distress of human life be aggravated! But if we allow his omniscience, we cannot doubt his providence. He would not foresee contingencies, for which he could not provide. His attributes are in fact so interwoven that it is impossible to separate them. His omniscience foresees, his understanding, which is infinite, arranges, his sovereignty decrees, his omnipotence executes the purposes of his will. His wisdom may see some things to be best for a while to answer certain temporary purposes, which would not be good for a continuance. When the present appointment shall have answered the end to which it was determined, a new one, to which that was preparatory, takes place. The two arrangements may appear to us not to be of a piece, to be even contradictory; while yet this determination and this succession are perfectly consistent in the mind of a being who sees all things at once, and "calls things that are not as though they were." God's view of all men and all events throughout all ages, is one clear, distinct, quick, simultaneous view. Infinite knowledge takes in present, past, and future in one comprehensive survey, pierces through all distance at a glance, and collects all ages into the focus of the existing moment.

Once thoroughly grounded and established in this faith and sense of the divine perfections, we shall never look upon any thing to be so monstrous or so minute, so insignificant or so exorbitant, as to be out of the precincts and control of eternal Providence. We shall never reduce, if the allusion

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may be forgiven, the powers of omnipotence to a level with that of some Indian rajah who has a territory too unwieldy for his management, or of an emperor of China who has more subjects than one monarch can govern.

We ask why evil rulers are permitted? We answer, though rather mechanically, our own question, by acknowledging that they are the appointed scourges of divine displeasure. Yet God does not delegate his *authority* to the oppressor, though he employs him as his instrument of correction; he still keeps the reins in his own hand. And besides that an offending world stood in need of the chastisement, these black instruments who are thus allowed to ravage the earth, may be, in the scheme of Providence, unintentionally preparing the elements of moral beauty. When divine displeasure has made barren a fruitful land "for the wickedness of them that dwell therein," the ploughshare and the harrow, which are sent to tear up the unproductive soil, know not that they are providing for the hand of the sower, who is following their rude traces in order to scatter the seeds of future riches and fertility.

Or, take the conflagration of a town. They whose houses are burnt are objects of our tenderest commiseration. The scene, if we beheld it, would alike excite our terror and our pity. But, after we have mourned over the devastation, and seen that despair is fruitless, at length necessity impels to industry; we see a new and fairer order of things arise; the convenience, symmetry, and beauty which spring out of the ashes make us eventually not only cease to regret the deformity and unsightliness to which they have succeeded, but almost reconcile us to the calamity which has led to the improvement.

Often have the earthquake, the hurricane, the bolt of heaven, kindling and throwing far and wide its baleful light on this earthly stage, realized in their ultimate effects this image. And we are reminded of a future, general conflagration, "when the elements shall melt with fervent heat, and the earth itself shall be burned up," which is to prove only the signal and the preparatory scene for a new heaven and a new earth wherein dwelleth righteousness. Let us, in every stage leading to this final "restitution of all things," wait with patience for its sure completion. Let us, in the mean time, give credit to the great Author of the book of fate for the consistency of its catastrophe!

When we peruse the compositions of a human author, we look for unity and consistency in his whole plan; we expect

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connection and relation between its several parts, and an entireness in the general combination. We are not so much delighted with a fine passage incidentally introduced, a short episode, of which we discern at once the rise and the end, and take in all the incidents and beauties at a single glance, as we are with the judgment which discovers itself in the distribution of the whole work, and the skill, not without difficulty discerned, which arranges, connects, and, as it were, links together the several divisions. Yet do we not sometimes presume to insinuate as if the great Author of all created nature cannot reduce the complexity of its parts into one consistent whole? Do we not intimate objections as if there were no concert, no agreement in the works of the almighty Mind? Do not the same persons who can speak in raptures of a perfect poem, a perfect scheme of reasoning, a perfect plan in architecture, yet presume to suspect that the concerns of the universe are carried on with less system, and on a more imperfect design, than the rude sketches of a frail creature, who is crushed before the moth?

But if we go so far as to leave to God the direction of the natural world, because we know not well, after all, to whom else to commit its management, yet we frequently make little scruple to take the government of the moral world into our own hands. If we consent to his ruling matter, we reluctantly allow that he governs mind. We reason as if we suspected that the passions of men lay beyond his control, and that their vices have overturned his dominion. But we should practically call to mind what is the daily language of our lips, not only that *his* is "the kingdom," but that the "power" is the source, and "the glory" the result of his administration. He does not, it is true, by an arbitrary compulsion of men's minds, rob them of that freedom by which they offend him, nor by a force on their liberty, prevent those sins and follies, which if he arbitrarily hindered, he would convert rational beings into mechanical ones; but he turns their sins and follies to such uses, that while by the voluntary commission of them they are bringing down destruction on their own heads, they are not impeding his purposes.

Nor does Providence, in his wide arrangements, exclude the operation of subordinate causes and motives, but allows them to assist the greater, and thereby to work his will; as subalterns in the battle contribute severally their share to the victory, while, like those inferior causes, they are compelled to keep their ranks, and not to aspire to the command. As we have a higher end, we must have a supreme direction to

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our aims. Yet a lower end is sometimes made a means to a higher, and assists its object without usurping its place. Some who begin by abstaining from evil, or set about doing good from a principle not entirely pure, are graciously led to the principle by doing or forbearing the action; and are finally landed at the higher point, from beginnings far below those at whice *we* might rashly have asserted they could only set out with any hope of success.

Though this may not very frequently occur, yet as it is by means God works, rather than by miracles; and as the world does not overflow with real piety, what a chaos would this earth become, if God did not permit inferior motives to operate to a certain degree for the general good! Many, whom the utmost stretch of charity cannot induce us to believe that they are acting from the purest principles, are yet contributing to the comfort and good order of society. Though they are sober only from a regard to their health, yet their temperance affords a good example; though they are prudent from no higher motive than the love of money, yet their frugality keeps them within the same bounds as if they were influenced by a better motive; though they may be liberal only to raise their reputation, yet their liberality feeds the hungry; though they are public-spirited merely from ambition, yet their patriotism, by rousing the spirit of the country, saves it. If such right actions, performed from such low motives, can look for no future retribution; if, being done without reference to the highest end, they do not advance the eternal interests of the doer, nor the glory of God, they are yet his instruments for promoting the good of others, both by utility and example. On this ground we may be thankful that there is so much refinement, generosity, and politeness among the higher orders of society, while we confess that, tear away the action from its motive, sunder the virtue from its legitimate reference, the act and the virtue lose their present character and their ultimate reward.

The means by which an infinitely wise God often promotes the most important plans, are apt illustrations of the blindness and obliquity of man's judgment. May we be allowed to offer an instance or two, in which human wisdom would probably have taken a course, in the appointment of instruments and events, directly opposite to that pursued by Infinite Wisdom? What earthly judge, if he had been questioned as to the means likely to produce one of the strongest evidences of the truth of Christianity to unbelievers, but would have named an agreement between Jews and Christians, as its fullest corrobo-

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ration? If we ourselves had an important cause depending—for instance, the ascertaining our right to a litigated estate;—if the success of the trial depended on the testimony of the witnesses, and on the authenticity of our title-deeds, whose testimony should we endeavor to obtain; into whose hands should we wish our vouchers to be committed? According to all human prudence should we not desire witnesses who had no known hostility to us; should we not object to a jury of avowed enemies; and should we not refuse to lodge our records in the hands of our opponents?

But HIS wisdom in whose sight ours is folly, has seen fit to make one of the most striking proofs of the truth of Christianity depend on the living miracle of the enmity of the Jews; "to them also were committed the oracles of God;" so that to both their ancient testimony and their present opposition we are to look for the most striking proofs of a religion which they behold with perpetual hatred. And now that Christianity is actually made to stand upon such evidence, what test can be more satisfactory? Reason itself owns its validity; for what collusion can now be charged upon the concurrent witnesses to Christianity, when each party in court is decidedly at variance with the other? Who can rationally question the strength of that title which is contained in their genuine archives—that evidence resulting from their hereditary denial of facts, of which they persist to reverence the predictions? Where can we more confidently look for the truth of a religion they detest, than to the verification conferred on it by their original history, their irreversible antipathy, their actual condition, and existing character?

To venture another specimen. If *we* had presumed to point out instruments for the destruction of Jerusalem, we should probably have thought none so appropriate as Constantine; we might have supposed the first Christian emperor would have been the fittest avenger of the Redeemer's blood. Omniscience selected for the awful retribution a pagan prince, a virtuous one it is true, but one who seemed to have no personal interest in the business, one to whom Jews and Christians, as such, were alike indifferent. While this utter desolation was the obvious accomplishment of a prophecy, which was to be a lasting evidence of the truth of our religion, the choice of the destroyer was one of those "secret things which belong to God," and is only to be alleged as a proof that "his ways are not our ways."

We will advert to another event, the most important since the incarnation of him whose pure worship it has restored—

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the Reformation. This occurrence is a peculiarly striking instance of our ignorance of the operations of Supreme Wisdom, and of the means which, to our short sight, seem fit or unfit for the accomplishment of his purposes. If ever the hand of Providence was conspicuous as the meridian sun, it was so in this mighty work; it was so in the selection of apparently discordant instruments; it was so in overruling the designs of some to a purpose opposite to their intention, in making the errors of others contribute to the general end. If this grand scheme had been exposed to *our* review for advice, if *we* had been consulted in its formation and its progress, how should we have criticised both the plan and its conductors? How should we have censured some of the agents as inadequate, condemned others as ill chosen, rejected one as unsuited, another as injurious! One critic would have insisted that the vehemence of Luther would mar any enterprise it might mean to advance; that so impetuous a projector would inevitably obstruct the establishment of a religion of meekness. Another would have pronounced, that among the human faculties, wit was, of all others, the least likely to assist the cause of piety; yet did Erasmus, by his exquisite satires on the ignorance and superstition of the priests, as completely contradict this opinion, as Luther, by his magnanimity and heroic perseverance, triumphantly overturned the other. This inconsiderate, blustering Henry, the human counsellor would have said, will ruin the cause by uniting his hostility to the reformers with his inconsistent resistance to the papal power; and yet this cause his very perverseness contributed to promote. Another censor would have been quite certain that the timid policy and cautious feeling of Charles the Wise would infallibly obstruct those measures which they were actually tending to advance. Who among us, if his opinion had been asked, would not have fixed on the pontiff of Rome and the emperor of the Turks, as the two last human beings to be selected for promoting the reformed religion? Who would have ventured to assert that the money raised by indulgences, through the profligate venality of Leo, for building St. Peter's in his own metropolis, was actually laying the foundation of every Protestant church in Britain, in Europe, in the world? Who could have predicted, that the imperial Mussulman, in banishing learning from his dominions, was preparing, as if by concert, an overwhelming antagonist to the sottish ignorance of the monks? All these things, separately considered, we, in our captious wisdom, should have pronounced calculated to

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produce effects directly contrary to the actual result; yet these ingredients, which had no natural affinity, amalgamated by the almighty hand, were made to accomplish one of the most important works that Infinite Wisdom, working by human means, has ever effected.

CHAP. III.

Practical Uses of the Doctrine of Providence.

We do not sufficiently make the doctrine of providence a practical doctrine. That the present dark dispensations which afflict the earth are indications of almighty displeasure few dispute; but having admitted the general fact, who almost does not ascribe the cause of offence to others? How few consider themselves as awfully contributing to draw down the visitation! We look with an exclusive eye to the abandoned and the avowedly profligate, and ascribe the whole weight of the divine indignation to their misdeeds. But we forget that when a sudden tempest threatened destruction to the ship going to Tarshish, in which there was only Jonah who feared God, those who inquired into the cause of the storm, found him to be the very man. The cause of the present desolating storm, as a pious divine observed of that which darkened his day, may as probably be the offences of professing Christians, as the presumptuous sins of the bolder transgressor. This apprehension should set us all on searching our hearts, for we cannot repent of the evil of which we are not conscious. It should put us upon watching against negligence; it should set us upon distrusting a false security, upon examining into the ground of our confidence. No dependence on the goodness of our spiritual condition, no trust in our exactness in some peculiar duties, no fancied superiority of ourselves to others, no exemption from gross and palpable disorders, should soothe us into a belief that we have no concern in the visitation. Throwing off their own guilt upon others was the second sin of the first offenders.

Another practical use of the doctrine of providence is, to enable us to maintain a composed frame of spirit under its ordinary dispensations. If we kept up a sense of God's agency in common as well as in extraordinary occurrences; if we were practically persuaded that nothing happens but by divine appointment, it might still those fluctuations of mind,

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quiet those uncertainties of temper, conquer that unreasonable exaltation or depression, which arise from our not habitually reflecting that all things are determined in number, or weight, or measure, by infinite love. If we acted under the full conviction that he who first set the world in motion governs every creature in it, that we do not take our place upon that stage in space, or that period in time, which we choose, but where and when *he* pleases; that it is he who "ordereth the bounds of our habitation, and fixeth our lot in life," we should not only contemplate with sober awe the strange events of the age in which we may be living, but cheerfully submit to our individual difficulties, as arising from the same predisposition of causes. Our neglecting to cultivate this train of thought may account for those murmurs which arise in our hearts, both for the public calamities of the world, and the private vexations of life.

If we took God into the account, we should feel that, as rational subjects of his moral government, we are bound to submit to it: we should not indulge discontent and resentment at events which we should then allow were either by his appointment or permission, as we now acknowledge in the more extraordinary cases. But how few are there who think themselves obliged to endure, without repining, the effects of accident, or the provocations of men? And this is because they see only the proximate cause, and do not perceive that God is the grand efficient. In our difficulties, if the sense of his presence were as strongly impressed upon us as the trial is powerfully felt, it would make the heart strong, and render the temptation feeble. Nor would it only strengthen us under temptation, but sustain us under affliction; we should become both humble by correction, and patient under it; we should be grateful in prosperity, without being elated by it. A deep conviction of God's authority over us and his property in us, would also make us kind to others as an acknowledgment that all is his. The very heathen entertained some sense of his sovereignty; they acknowledged at least their victories to proceed from him, when they dedicated their spoils *to the deliverer*.

If we maintained this constant sense of his providential government, we should be more instant in prayer, we should more fervently supplicate him in our distresses, and more devoutly adore him for his mercies. The recognition of his sovereignty infers the duty of prayer to him, of implicit trust in him, of unqualified submission to him; for the same argument which proves that he should govern, makes it right that

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we should obey; and the avowal of that obedience is alike consistent with the character of the subject, and the claims of the sovereign. Thus used, there is no consolation to an afflicted world like that which is derived from the position contained in the proclamation of the imperial penitent of Babylon, "that the Most High ruleth in the kingdoms of men;" that he ruleth not by an arbitrary will, but, to borrow the emphatic language of the Apocalypse, by the perfections of THE MIND THAT HATH WISDOM.

But as we seem virtually to divide the affairs of the world into two portions, we talk as if we did not think certain ordinary trials considerable enough to come from God, nor of course to require that we should meet them with temper. Under these, therefore, we make ourselves what amends we can for the vexation of trials more severe, by indulging fretfulness, secure of impunity. But let us be assured of these two things, if it be a trial at all it comes from God, if it disturb our peace, however trivial in itself, it is not small to us, and therefore claims submission.

It is worth our observation that they who are ready to quarrel with Omnipotence for the infliction of pain and suffering, poverty and distress, seldom arraign him for their intellectual or moral deficiencies. Most men are better satisfied with their allotment of capacity than of health; of virtue than of riches; of skill than of power. We seldom grudgingly compare our mental endowments with those of others who are obviously more highly gifted, while we are sufficiently forward to repine at their superiority in worldly advantages. Though too sensibly alive to the narrower limits in which our fortune is confined, we do not lament our severer restrictions in the article of personal merit. In the latter instance vanity supports as completely as in the former envy disturbs.

Most of the calamities of human life originate with ourselves. Even sickness, shame, pain, and death were not originally the infliction of God. But out of many evils, whether sent us by his immediate hand, or brought on us by our own faults, much eventual good is educed by him, who by turning our suffering to our benefit, repairs by grace the evils produced by sin. Without being the author of evil, the bare suggestion of which is blasphemy, he converts it to his own glory, by causing the effects of it to promote our good. If the virtuous suffer from the crimes of the wicked, it is because their imperfect goodness stood in need of chastisement. Even the wicked, who are suffering by their own sins, or the

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sins of each other, are sometimes brought back to God by mutual injuries, the sense of which awakens them to compunction for their own offences. God makes use of the faults even of good men to show them their own insufficiency, to abase them in their own eyes, to cure them of vanity and self-dependence. He makes use of their smaller failings, to set them on the watch against great ones; of their imperfections, to put them on their guard against sins; of their faults of inadvertency, to increase their dread of such as are wilful. This superinduced vigilance teaches them to fear all the resemblances, and to shun all the approaches to sin. It is a salutary fear, which keeps them from using all the liberty they have; it leads them to avoid, not only whatever is decidedly wrong, but to stop short of what is doubtful, to keep clear of what is suspicious; well knowing the thin partitions which separate danger from destruction. It teaches them to watch the buddings and germinations of evil, to anticipate the pernicious fruit in the opening blossom.

The weakness and inactivity of our faith expose us to continual distrust. When we ourselves are idle, we are disposed to suspect that the Omnipotent is not at work. That process which we do not see, we are too much inclined to suspect is not going on. From this unhallowed egotism, where we are not the prime movers, we fancy that all stands still. The various parts of the scheme of Providence are sometimes connected by a thread so fine as to elude our dim sight; but, though it may be so attenuated as to be invisible, it is never broken off. The plan is carrying on, and the work, perhaps, about to be accomplished, while we are accusing the Great Artificer, as if he were capable of neglect, or liable to error. But if, after tracing Providence through many a labyrinth, we seem to lose sight of him; if, after having lost our clue, we are tempted to suspect that this operation is suspended, or that his agency has ceased, he is working all the time out of sight; he is proceeding, if the comparison may be allowed, like the fabled Arethusa, whose stream having disappeared in the place to which it had been followed up, is still making its way under ground; though we are not cured of our incredulity, till we again discover him, bursting forth like the same river, which, having pursued its hidden passage through every obstruction, rises once more in all its beauty in another and an unexpected place.

But even while we are rebelling against his dispensations, we are taking our hints in the economy of public and private life from the economy of Providence in the administration

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of the world. We govern our country by laws emulative of those by which he governs his creatures: we train our children by probationary discipline, as he trains his servants. Penal laws in states, like those of the divine Legislator, indicate no hatred to those to whom they are proclaimed, for every man is at liberty not to break them; they are enacted in the first instance for admonition rather than chastisement, and serve as much for prevention as punishment. The discipline maintained in all well-ordered families is intended not only to promote their virtue, but their happiness. The intelligent child perceives his father's motive for restraining him, till the act of obedience having induced the habit, and both having broken in his rebellious will, he loves the parent the more for the restraint; on the other hand, the mismanaged and ruined son learns to despise the father, who has given him a license to which he has discernment enough to perceive he owes the miseries consequent upon his uncurbed appetites.

It is however to be lamented, that this great doctrine of God's universal superintendence is not only madly denied, or inconsistently overlooked by one class of men, but is foolishly perverted, or fanatically abused by another. Without entering upon the wide field of instances, we shall confine our remarks to two that are the most common. First, the fanciful, frivolous, and bold familiarity with which this supreme dictation and government are cited on the most trivial occasions, and adduced in a manner dishonorable to infinite wisdom, and derogatory to supreme goodness. The persons who are guilty of this fault seem not to perceive, that it is not more foolish and presumptuous to deny it altogether, than to expect that God's particular providence will interpose, in order to save their exertions, or excuse their industry. For though Providence directs and assists virtuous endeavors, he never, by superseding them, encourages idleness, or justifies presumption.

The highly censurable use to which some others convert this divine agency, is, when not only the pretence of trusting Providence is made the plea for the indolent desertion of their own duty, but an unwarrantable confidence in providential leadings is adopted to excuse their own imprudence. Great is the temerity, when Providence is virtually reproached for the ill success of our affairs, or pleaded as an apology for our own wilfulness, or as a vindication of our own absurdity in the failure of some foolish plan, or some irrational pursuit. We have no right to depend on a supernatural interposition

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to help us out of difficulties into which we have been thrown by our misconduct, or under distresses into which we have been plunged by our errors. God, though he knows the prayers which we may offer, and accepts the penitence which we feel, will not use his power to correct our ill-judged labors, any otherwise than by making us smart for their consequences.

The power of God, as it is not an idle, so it is not a solitary prerogative. It is indeed an attribute in constant exercise; it is not kept for state, but use; not for display, but exercise; and as it is infinite, one half of the concerns of the universe are not, as we intimated before, suspended, because he is superintending the other half. He is perpetually examining the chronicles of human kind, and inspecting the register of human actions; not like the king in the palace of Shushan,* because "he cannot rest," for Omniscience never slumbers or sleeps; nor like him to repair the wrongs of one man whose services had remained unrequited; but that, "beholding the evil and the good," no services may go unnoticed and unrecompensed, from the earliest offering of pious Abel, to the latest oblation of faith in the end of time.

This view of things, and it is the view which the enlightened Christian takes, tends to correct his anger against second causes, and affords him such an assurance that every occurrence will be overruled by everlastnig love for his eventual good, inspires him with such holy confidence in the promises of the gospel, that he acquires a repose of spirit, not merely from compelled submission to authority, but from rational acquiescence in goodness. He feels that his confirmed belief in this universal agency is the only thing that can set his heart at rest, still its perturbations, moderate its impatience, soothe its terrors, confirm its faith, preserve its peace, or, when it has suffered a momentary suspension, restore it.

Nor does God exercise his providence alone either in signal instances of retribution, or in the hidden consolations of the believer; but those secret stings of conscience which goad and lacerate every guilty individual in any criminal pursuit, that lurking discontent which gives the lie to flattery, and mingles the note of discord with the music of acclamation, that unprompted misery of feeling, which infuses wormwood into his sweetest pleasures, proceeds from the same providential infliction.

Some men seem to admit a providence on a scale which expands their ideas, but fancy it an affront to conceive of him

* Ahasuerus.—Esther, chap. vi.

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on one which they think contracts them. If they allow that he takes a sweeping view of nations, yet they imply that it would be too minute an exercise of his superintendence to inspect individuals. The truth is, as we intimated before, men are too much disposed to frame their conceptions of God by the limited powers and capacities of human greatness. They observe, that a king who controls the affairs of a vast empire cannot possibly inspect the concerns of every private family, much less of every single subject. This limited capacity they unconsciously, yet irreverently, transfer to the King of kings. But as no concern is so vast as to encumber Omnipotence, so none is too diminutive to escape the eye of Omniscience. There is no argument for a general, but is also an argument for a particular providence, unless we can prove that the whole is not made up of parts; that generals are not composed of particulars; that nations are not compounded of families; that societies are not formed of individuals; that chains are not composed of links; that sums are not made up of units; that the interests of a community do not grow out of the well-being of its members. The interests of a particular member, indeed, may sometimes appear to suffer from that which promotes the general good, yet He, by whose law the individual may seem to be injured, has means of remuneration or of comfort which may prevent the sufferer from being ultimately a loser. If, as we are assured, upon God's own authority, that our tears are treasured up by him, will not their appropriate consolations be also provided? Though *He whose footsteps are not known*, may act in some instances in a manner incomprehensible to us, yet if we allow that he acts wisely and holily in cases which we do comprehend, we should give him credit in the obscure and impenetrable cases, for he can no more act contrary to his attributes in the one instance than in the other.

Every intelligent being, therefore, should look up to divine Providence, not only as engaged in the government and disposal of states, but as exercised for his individual protection, peace, and comfort;—should look habitually to Him who confers favor without claim, and happiness without merit; to Him whose veracity fulfils all the promises which his goodness has made; to Him whose pity commiserates the afflicted, whose bounty supplies the indigent, whose long-suffering bears with the rebellious, whose love absolves the guilty, whose mercy in Christ Jesus accepts the penitent. Such is the fulness of that attribute which we sum up in a single word, *the goodness of God*. It is this goodness which influ-

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ences his other attributes in our favor, attributes which would else necessarily act against creatures at once sinful and impotent. It makes that wisdom which sees our weakness strengthen us, and that power which might overwhelm us act for our preservation. Without this goodness, all his other perfections would be to us as the beauties of his natural creation would be, if the sun were blotted from the firmament—they might indeed exist, but without this illuminating and cherishing principle, as we should neither have seen nor felt them, so to us they could not be said *to be*.

Some Christians seem to view the Almighty as encircled with no attribute but his sovereignty. God, in establishing his moral government, might indeed have acted *solely* by his sovereignty. He might have pleaded no other reason for our allegiance but his absolute dominion. He might have governed arbitrarily, without explaining the nature of his requisitions: he might have reigned over us as a king, without endearing himself to us as a father. He might have exacted fealty, without the offer of remuneration. Instead of this, while he maintains his entire title to our obedience, he mitigates the austerity of command by the invitations of his kindness, and softens the rigor of authority by the allurement of his promises. In holding out menaces to deter us from disobedience, he balances them with the offered plenitude of our own felicity, and thus, instead of terrifying, attracts us to obedience. If he threatens, it is that by intimidating he may be spared the necessity of punishing; if he promises, it is that we may perceive our happiness to be bound up with our obedience. Thus his goodness invites us to a compliance, which his sovereignty might have demanded on the single ground that it was his due. Whereas he seems almost to wave our duty as a claim, as if to afford us the merit of a voluntary obedience; though the very will to obey is his gift, he promises to accept it as if it were our own act. He first inspires the desire and then rewards it. Thus his power, if we may hazard the expression, gives place to his goodness, and he presses us by tenderness almost more than he constrains us by authority. He even condescends to make our happiness no less a motive for our duty than his injunctions; hear his affectionate apostrophe—"Oh that thou hadst hearkened to my commandments, then had thy peace been as a river!"

It was that his goodness might have the precedency of his omnipotence, that he vouchsafed to give the law in the shape of a covenant. He stooped to enter into a sort of reciprocal

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engagement with his creatures,—he condescended to stipulate with the work of his hands! But the consummation of his goodness was reserved for his work of redemption. Here he not only performed the office, but assumed the name of LOVE; a name with which, notwithstanding all his preceding wonders of providence and grace, he was never invested till after the completion of this last, greatest act:—an act towards his pardoned rebels, not only of indemnity, but promotion;—an act which the angels desire to scrutinize, and which man will never fully comprehend till he enters on that beatitude to which it has introduced him.

CHAP. IV.

"Thy will be done."

To desire to know the divine will is the first duty of a being so ignorant as man; to endeavor to obey it is the most indispensable duty of a being at once so corrupt and so dependent. The Holy Scriptures frequently comprise the essence of the Christian temper in some short aphorism, apostrophe, or definition. The essential spirit of the Christian life may be said to be included in this one brief petition of the Christian's prayer, "THY WILL BE DONE;" just as the distinguishing characteristic of the irreligious may be said to consist in following his own will.

There is a haughty spirit which, though it will not complain, does not care to submit. It arrogates to itself the dignity of enduring, without any claim to the meekness of yielding. Its silence is stubbornness, its fortitude is pride; its calmness is apathy without, and discontent within. In such characters it is not so much the will of God which is the rule of conduct, as the scorn of pusillanimity. Not seldom indeed the mind puts in a claim for a merit to which the nerves could make out a better title. Yet the suffering which arises from acute feeling is so far from deducting from the virtue of resignation, that, when it does not impede the sacrifice, it enhances the value. True resignation is the hardest lesson in the whole school of Christ. It is the oftenest taught and the latest learnt. It is not a task which, when once got over in some particular instance, leaves us master of the subject. The necessity of following up the lesson we have begun, presents itself almost every day in some new shape, or occurs

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under some fresh modification. The submission of yesterday does not exonerate us from the resignation of to-day. The principle, indeed, once thoroughly wrought into the soul, gradually reconciles us to the frequent demand for its exercise, and renders every successive call more easy.

We read dissertations on this subject, not only with the most entire concurrence of the judgment, but with the most apparent acquiescence of the mind. We write essays upon it in the hour of peace and composure, and fancy that what we have discussed with so much ease and self-complacence, in favor of which we offer so many arguments to convince and so many motives to persuade, cannot be very difficult to practise. But to convince the understanding and to correct the will is a very different undertaking; and not less difficult when it comes to our own case than it was in the case of those for whom we have been so coolly and dogmatically prescribing. It is not till we practically find how slowly our own arguments produce any effect on ourselves that we cease to marvel at their inefficacy on others. The sick physician tastes with disgust the bitterness of the draught, to the swallowing of which he wondered the patient had felt so much repugnance; and the reader is sometimes convinced by the arguments which fail of their effect on the writer, when he is called, not to discuss, but to act, not to reason, but to suffer. The theory is so just and the duty so obvious, that even bad men assent to it; the exercise so trying that the best men find it more easy to commend the rule than to adopt it. But he who has once gotten engraved, not in his memory but in his heart, this divine precept, THY WILL BE DONE, has made a proficiency which will render all subsequent instruction comparatively easy.

Though sacrifices and oblations were offered to God under the law by his own express appointment, yet he peremptorily rejected them by his prophets, when presented as substitutes instead of signs. Will he, under a more perfect dispensation, accept of any observances which are meant to supersede internal dedication—of any offerings unaccompanied by complete desire of acquiescence in his will? "My son, give me thine heart," is his brief but imperative command. But before we can be brought to comply with the spirit of this requisition, God must enlighten our understanding that our devotion may be rational, he must rectify our will that it may be voluntary, he must purify our heart that it may be spiritual.

Submission is a duty of such high and holy import that it

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can only be learnt of the Great Teacher. If it could have been acquired by mere moral instruction, the wise sayings of the ancient philosophers would have taught it. But their most elevated standard was low; their strongest motives were the brevity of life, the instability of fortune, the dignity of suffering virtue, things within their narrow sphere of judging; things true indeed as far as they go, but a substratum by no means equal to the superstructure to be built on it. It wanted depth and strength and solidity for the purposes of support. It wanted the only true basis, the assurance that God orders all things according to the purposes of his will for our final good; it wanted that only sure ground of faith by which the genuine Christian cheerfully submits in entire dependence on the promises of the gospel.

Nor let us fancy that we are to be languid and inactive recipients of the divine dispensations. Our own souls must be enlarged, our own views must be ennobled, our own spirit must be dilated. An inoperative acquiescence is not all that is required of us: and if we must not slacken our zeal in doing good, so we must not be remiss in opposing evil, on the flimsy ground that God has permitted evil to infest the world. If it be his will to permit sin, it is an opposition to his will when we do not labor to counteract it. This surrender, therefore, of our will to that of God, takes in a large sweep of actual duties, as well as the whole compass of passive obedience. It involves doing as well as suffering, activity as well as acquiescence, zeal as well as forbearance. Yet the concise petition daily slips off the tongue without our reflecting on the weight of the obligation we are imposing on ourselves. We do not consider the extent and consequences of the prayer we are offering, the sacrifices, the trials, the privations it may involve, and the large indefinite obedience to all the known and unknown purposes of Infinite Wisdom to which we are pledging ourselves.

There is no case in which we more shelter ourselves in generalities. Verbal sacrifices cost little, cost nothing. The familiar habit of repeating the petition almost tempts us to fancy that the duty is as easy as the request is short. We are ready to think that a prayer rounded off in four monosyllables can scarcely involve duties co-extensive with our whole course of being; that, in uttering them, we renounce all right in ourselves, that we acknowledge the universal, indefeasible title of *the blessed and only Potentate;* that we make over to him the right to do in us, and with us, and by us, whatever he sees good for ourselves, whatever will promote his glory,

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though by means sometimes as incomprehensible to our understanding as unacceptable to our will, because we neither know the motive nor perceive the end. These simple words express an act of faith the most sublime, an act of allegiance the most unqualified; and, while they make a declaration of entire submission to a Sovereign the most absolute, they are, at the same time, a recognition of love to a Father the most beneficent.

We must remember, that in offering this prayer, we may, by our own request, be offering to resign what we most dread to lose, to give up what is dear to us as our own soul; we may be calling on our heavenly Father to withhold what we are most anxiously laboring to attain, and to withdraw what we are most sedulously endeavoring to keep. We are solemnly renouncing our property in ourselves, we are distinctly making ourselves over again to him whose we already are. We specifically entreat him to do with us what he pleases, to mould us to a conformity to his image, without which we shall never be resigned to his will; in short, to dispose of us as his infinite wisdom sees best, however contrary to the scheme which our blindness has laid down as the path to unquestionable happiness.

To render this trying petition easy to us, is one great reason why God, by such a variety of providences, afflicts and brings us low. He knows that we want incentives to humility, even more than incitements to virtuous actions. He shows us in many ways, that self-sufficiency and happiness are incompatible; that pride and peace are irreconcilable; that following our own way, and doing our own will, which we conceive to be of the very essence of felicity, is in direct opposition to it.

"Christianity," says bishop Horseley, "involves many paradoxes, but no contradictions." To be able to say with entire surrender of the heart, "Thy will be done," is the true liberty of the children of God, that liberty with which Christ has made them free. It is a liberty, not which delivers us from restraint, but which, freeing us from our subjection to the senses, makes us find no pleasure but in order, no safety but in the obedience of an intelligent being to his rightful Lord. In delivering us from the heavy bondage of sin, it transfers us to the "easy yoke of Christ," from the galling slavery of the world, to the "light burden" of him who overcame it.

This liberty, in giving a true direction to the affections, gives them amplitude as well as elevation. The more uncon-

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strained the will becomes, the more it fixes on one object; once fixed on the highest, it does not use its liberty for versatility but for constancy, not for change but fidelity, not for wavering but adherence.

It is, therefore, no less our interest than our duty, to keep the mind in an habitual posture of submission. "Adam," says Dr. Hammond, "after his expulsion, was a greater slave in the wilderness than he had been in the inclosure." If the barbarian ambassador came expressly to the Romans to negociate from his country for permission to be their servants, declaring, that a voluntary submission, even to a foreign power, was preferable to a wild and disorderly freedom, well may the Christian triumph in the peace and security to be attained by a complete subjugation to him who is emphatically called *the God of order*.

A vital faith manifests itself in vital acts. "Thy will be done," is eminently a practical petition. The first indication of the gaoler's change of heart was a practical indication. He did not ask, "Are there few that be saved," but, "What shall *I* do to be saved?" The first symptom St. Paul gave of his conversion, was a practical symptom: "Lord, what wilt thou have me to do?" He entered on his new course with a total renunciation of his own will. It seemed to this great apostle, to be the turning point between infidelity and piety, whether he should follow his own will, or the will of God. He did not amuse his curiosity with speculative questions. His own immediate and grand concern engrossed his whole soul. Nor was his question a mere hasty effusion, an interrogative springing out of that mixed feeling of awe and wonder which accompanied his first overwhelming convictions. It became the abiding principle which governed his future life, which made him in labors more abundant. Every successive act of duty, every future sacrifice of ease, sprung from it, was influenced by it. His own will, his ardent, impetuous, fiery will, was not merely subdued, it was extinguished. His powerful mind, indeed, lost none of its energy, but his proud heart relinquished all its independence.

We allow and adopt the term *devotion* as an indispensable part of religion, because it is supposed to be limited to the act; but *devotedness*, from which it is derived, does not meet with such ready acceptation, because this is a habit, and a habit involves more than act; it pledges us to consistency, it implies fixedness of character, a general confirmed state of mind, a giving up what we are, and have, and do, to God. Devotedness does not consist in the length of our prayers

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nor in the number of our good works, for, though these are the surest evidences of piety, they are not its essence. Devotedness consists in doing and suffering, bearing and forbearing in the way which God prescribes. The most inconsiderable duty performed with alacrity, if it oppose our own inclination; the most ordinary trial met with a right spirit, is more acceptable to him than a greater effort of our own devising. We do not commend a servant for his activity, if ever so fervently exercised, in doing whatever gratifies his own fancy: we do not consider his performance as obedience, unless his activity has been exercised in doing what we required of him. Now, how can we insist on his doing what contradicts his own humor, while we allow ourselves to feel repugnance in serving our heavenly Master, when his commands do not exactly fall in with our own inclination?

We must also give God leave, not only to take his own way, but his own time. The appointment of seasons, as well as of events, is his. "He waits to be gracious." If he delays, it is because we are not yet brought to that state which fits us for the grant of our request. It is not he who must be brought about, but we ourselves. Or, perhaps, he refuses the thing we ask, in order to give us a better. We implore success in an undertaking, instead of which, he gives us content under the disappointment. We ask for the removal of pain; he gives us patience under it. We desire deliverance from our enemies; he sees that we have not yet turned their enmity to our improvement, and he will bring us to a better temper by further exercise. We desire him to avert some impending trial; instead of averting it, he takes away its bitterness; he mitigates what we believed would be intolerable, by giving us a right temper under it. How, then, can we say he has failed of his promise, if he gives something more truly valuable than we had requested at his hands?

Some virtues are more called out in one condition of life, and some in another. The exercise of certain qualities has its time and place; but an endeavor after conformity to the image of God, which is best attained by submission to his will, is of perpetual obligation. If he does not require all virtues under all circumstances, there is no state or condition in which he does not require that to which our church perpetually calls us, "an humble, lowly, penitent, and obedient heart." We may have no time, no capacity, no special call for deeds of notorious usefulness; but whatever be our pursuits, engagements, or abilities, it will intrench on no time, require no specific call, interfere with no duty, to subdue our

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perverse will. Though the most severe of all duties, it infringes on no other, but will be the more effectually fulfilled by the very difficulties attending on other pursuits and engagements.

We are so fond of having our own will, that it is astonishing we do not oftener employ it for our own good; for our inward peace is augmented in exact proportion as our repugnance to the divine will diminishes. Were the conquest over the one complete, the enjoyment of the other would be perfect. But the Holy Spirit does not assume his emphatical title, the COMFORTER, till his previous offices have operated on the heart, till he has "reproved us of sin, of righteousness, of judgment."

God makes use of methods inconceivable to us, to bring us to the submission which we are more ready to request with our lips, than to desire with our hearts. By an imperceptible operation he is ever at work for our good; he promotes it by objects the most unpromising, by events the most unlikely. He employs means to our shallow views the most improbable to effect his own gracious purposes. In every thing he evinces that his thoughts are not as our thoughts. He overrules the opposition of our enemies, the defection of our friends, the faults of our children—the loss of our fortune as well as the disappointments attending its possession—the unsatisfactoriness of pleasures as well as the privation—the contradiction of our desires—the failure of plans which we thought we had concerted, not only with good judgment, but pure intentions. He makes us sensible of our faults by the mischiefs they bring upon us; and acknowledge our blindness, by extracting from it consequences diametrically opposite to those which our actions were intended to produce.

Our love to God is stamped with the same imperfection with all our other graces. If we love him at all, it is as it were traditionally, hereditarily, professionally; it is a love of form and not of feeling, of education and not of sentiment, of sense and not of faith. It is at best a submission to authority, and not an effusion of voluntary gratitude, a conviction of the understanding, and not a cordiality of the affections. We rather assume we have this grace than actually possess it, we rather take it for granted on unexamined grounds, than cherish it as a principle from which whatever good we have must proceed, and from which, if it does not proceed, the principle does not exist.

Surely, say the oppugners of divine providence, in considering the calamities inflicted on good men, if God loved virtue,

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he would not oppress the virtuous. Surely Omnipotence may find a way to make his children good, without making them miserable. But have these casuists ever devised a means by which men may be made good without being made humble, or happy without being made holy, or holy without trials? Unapt scholars indeed we are in learning the lessons taught! But the Teacher is not the less perfect because of the imbecility of his children.

If it be the design of Infinite Goodness to disengage us from the world, to detach us from ourselves, and to purify us to himself, the purification by sufferings seems the most obvious method. The same effect could not be any otherwise produced, except by miracles, and God is an economist of his means in grace as well as in nature. He deals out all his gifts by measure. His operation in both is progressive. Successive events operate in one case as time and age in the other. As suns and showers so gradually mature the fruits of the earth, that the growth is rather perpetual than perceptible, so God commonly carries on the work of renovation in the heart silently and slowly, by means suitable and simple, though to us imperceptible, and sometimes unintelligible. Were the plans more obvious, and the process ostensible, there would be no room left for the operations of faith, no call for the exercise of patience, no demand for the grace of humility. The road to perfection is tedious and suffering, steep and rugged; our impatience would leap over all the intervening space which keeps us from it, rather than climb it by slow and painful steps. We would fain be spared the sorrow and shame of our own errors, of all their vexatious obstructions, all their dishonorable impediments. We would be completely good and happy at once, without passing through the stages and gradations which lead to goodness and happiness. We require an instantaneous transformation which would cost us nothing; the spirit of God works by a gradual process which costs us much. We would combine his favor with our self-indulgence; we would be spared the trials he has appointed without losing the felicity he has promised. We complain of the severity of the operation, but the operation would not be so severe if the disease did not lie so deep.

Besides, the afflictions which God appoints are not seldom sent to save us from those we should bring on ourselves, and which might have added guilt to misery. He threatens, but it is that he may finally save. If "punishment is his strange," it is also his necessary "work." Even in the sorest affliction, the loss of those we love, there may be a

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mercy impenetrable to us. God has, perhaps, laid up for us in heaven that friend whom we might have lost in eternity, had he been restored to our prayers here. But if the affliction be not improved, it is, indeed, unspeakably heavy. If the loss of our friend does not help to detach us from the world, we have the calamity without the indemnification; we are deprived of our treasure without any advantage to ourselves. If the loss of him we loved does not make us more earnest to secure our salvation, we may lose at once our friend and our soul. To endure the penalty and lose the profit, is to be emphatically miserable.

Sufferings are the only relics of the true cross, and when divine grace turns them to our spiritual good, they almost perform the miracles which blind superstition ascribes to the false one. God mercifully takes from us what we have not courage to offer him; but if, when he resumes it, he sanctifies the loss, let us not repine. It was his while it was ours. He was the proprietor while we were the possessors.

Though we profess a general readiness to submit to the divine will, there is nothing in which we are more liable to illusion. Self-love is a subtle casuist. We invent distinctions. We too critically discriminate between afflictions which proceed more immediately from God, and disappointments which come from the world. To the former we acknowledge, in words at least, our willingness to submit. In the latter, though equally his dispensation, we seem to feel justified in refusing to acquiesce. God does not desire us to inflict punishments on ourselves; he only expects us to bear with patience those he inflicts on us, whether they come more immediately from himself or through the medium of his creatures.

Love being the root of obedience, it is no test of that obedience, if we obey God only in things which do not cross our inclinations, while we disobey him in things that are repugnant to them. Not to obey except when it costs us nothing is rather to please ourselves than God, for it is evident we should disobey him in these also if the allurement were equally powerful in these cases as in the others. We may, indeed, plead in apology that the command we resist is of less importance than that with which we comply; but this is a false excuse, for the authority which enjoins the least, is the same with that which commands the greatest; and it is the authority to which we are to submit, as much as to the command.

There is a passage in St. Luke which does not seem to be always brought to bear on this point as fully as it ought:

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"Unless a man forsake all that he hath, he cannot be my disciple." This does not seem to be quite identical with the command in another place, that "a man should sell all that he has," &c. When the Christian world, indeed, was in its infancy, the literal requisition in both cases was absolutely necessary. But it appears to be a more liberal interpretation of the command, as "forsaking" all that we have, extends to a full and entire consecration of ourselves to God, a dedication without reserve, not of fortune only, but of every desire, every faculty, every inclination, every talent; a resignation of the whole will, a surrender of the whole soul. It is this surrender which alone sanctifies our best actions. It is this pure oblation, this offering of unshared affection, this unmaimed sacrifice, which is alone acceptable to God, through *that full, perfect, and sufficient sacrifice, oblation, and satisfaction*, made for the sins of the whole world. Our money he will not accept without our good will, our devotions without our affections, our services without our hearts. Like the prevaricating pair, whose duplicity was punished by instant death, whatever we keep back will annihilate the value of what we bring. It will be nothing if it be not all.*

CHAP. V.

On Parable.

It is obvious, that the reason why mankind, in general, are so much delighted with allegory and metaphor, is, because they are so proportioned to our senses, those first inlets of ideas. Ideas gained by the senses quickly pass into the region of the imagination; and from thence, more particularly the illiterate and uninformed, fetch materials for the employment of their reason. Little reaches the understanding of the mass but through this medium. Their minds are not fitted for the reception of abstract truth. Dry argumentative instruction, therefore, is not proportioned to their capacity; the faculty by which a right conclusion is drawn, is, in them, the most defective; they rather feel strongly than judge accurately: and their feelings are awakened by the impression made on their senses.

The connection of these remarks with the subject of instruction by parable, is obvious. It is the nature of parable

* Acts, chap. v.

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to open the doctrine which it professes to conceal. By engaging attention and exciting curiosity, it develops truth with more effect than by a more explicit exposition. By laying hold on the imagination, parable insinuates itself into the affections, and, by the intercommunication of the faculties, the understanding is made to apprehend the truth which was proposed to the fancy.

There is commonly found sufficient rectitude of judgment in the generality to decide fairly on any point within their reach of mind, if the decision neither opposes their interest nor interferes with their prejudice. If you can separate the truth from any personal concern of their own, their verdict will probably be just; but if their views are clouded by passion, or biased by selfishness, that man must possess a more than ordinary degree of integrity who decides against himself and in favor of what is right.

In the admirably devised parable of Nathan, David's eager condemnation of the unsuspected offender is a striking instance of the delusion of sin and the blindness of self-love. He who had lived a whole year in the unrepented commission of one of the blackest crimes of the decalogue, and who, to secure himself the object for which he had committed it, perpetrated another almost more heinous, and that with an hypocrisy foreign to his character, could in an instant denounce death on the imaginary offender for a fault comparatively trifling. The vehemence of his resentment even overstepped the limits of his natural justice, in decreeing a punishment disproportioned to the crime, while he remained dead to his own deep delinquency. A pointed parable instantly surprised him into the most bitter self-reproach. A direct accusation might have inflamed him before he was thus prepared; and, in the one case, he might have punished the accuser, by whom, in the other, he was brought to the deepest self-abasement. The prudent prophet did not rashly reproach the king with the crime he wished him to condemn, but placed the fault at such a distance, and in such a proper point of view, that he first procured his impartial judgment, and afterwards his self-condemnation. An important lesson, not only to the offender, but to the reprover.

He "who knew what was in man," and who intended his religion, not for a few critics to argue upon, but for a whole world to act upon, frequently adopted the mode of instructing by allegory. Though he sometimes condescended to unveil the hidden sense, by disclosing the moral meaning, in some short, but most significant comment; yet he usually left the

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application to those whom he meant to benefit by the doctrine. The truth which spoke strongly to their prejudices, by the veil in which it was wrapped, spared the shame while it conveyed the instruction; and they probably found a gratification in the ingenuity of their own solution which contributed to reconcile them to the sharpness of the reproof.

The most unjust and prejudiced of the Jews were, by this wise management, frequently drawn in to give an unconscious testimony against themselves; this was especially the case in the instance of the householder and his servants. Had the truth they were led to deduce from this parable been presented in the offensive form of a direct charge, it would have fired them with inexpressible indignation.

Christians who abound in zeal, but are defective in knowledge and prudence, would do well to remember that *discretion* made a remarkable, though not disproportionate part of the Redeemer's character; he never invited attack by imprudence, or provoked hostility by intemperate rashness. When argument was not listened to, when persuasion was of no avail, when even all his miracles of mercy were misrepresented, and his divine beneficence thrown away, so that all farther attempts to do good were unavailing, *he withdrew to another place;* there, indeed, to experience the same malignity, there to exercise the same compassion.

The divine Author of our religion gave also the example of teaching, not only by parable, but by simple propositions, detached truths, pointed interrogations, positive injunctions, and independent prohibitions, rather than by elaborate and continuous dissertation. He instructed, not only by consecutive arguments, but by invitations, and dissuasives adapted to the feelings, and intelligible to the apprehensions of his audience. He drew their attention by popular allusions, delighted it by vivid representations, and fixed it by reference to actual events. He alluded to the Galileans, crushed by the falling tower, which they remembered—to local scenery—the vines of Gethsemane, which they beheld, while he was descanting respectively upon repentance, and upon himself, as the "true vine." By these simple, but powerful and suitable methods, he brought their daily habits, and every-day ideas, to run in the same channel with their principles and their duties, and made every object with which they were surrounded contribute its contingent to their instruction.

The lower ranks, who most earnestly sought access to his person, could form a tolerably exact judgment on the things he taught, by the aptness of his allusions to what they saw,

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and felt, and heard. The humble situation he assumed, also, prevented their being intimidated by power, or influenced by authority. It at once made their attendance a voluntary act, and their assent an unbiased conviction. The questions proposed with a simple desire of instruction, were answered with condescending kindness; those dictated by curiosity or craft, were repelled with wisdom, or answered, not by gratifying importunity, but by grafting on the reply some higher instruction than the inquirer had either proposed or desired. Where a direct answer would, by exciting prejudice, have impeded usefulness, he evaded the particular question by enforcing from it some general truth. On the application of the man whose brother had refused to divide the inheritance with him, in declining to interfere judicially, he gave a great moral lecture of universal use against avarice, while he prudently avoided the subject of the particular litigation.

His answer to the entangling question, "And who is my neighbor?" suggested the instructive illustration of the duty to a neighbor, in that brief, but highly finished apologue of the good Samaritan. The Jews, who would never have owned that a Samaritan was their neighbor, were, by this pious management, drawn in to acknowledge, that every man, without regard to country, who was even of a hostile country, if he needed their assistance, was their neighbor. In this slight outline, three characters are sketched with so much spirit and distinctness, that, as Mr. Boyle says of Scripture truths in general, they resemble those portraits, whose eyes, every one who enters the room, fancies are fixed on him.

False zeal, which he generally found associated with pride and hypocrisy, was almost the only vice which extorted from him unmitigated severity: if he sometimes corrected presumption and repelled malicious inquisitiveness, he uniformly encouraged distress to approach, and penitence to address him. The most indirect of his instructions inculcated or encouraged goodness. The most simple of his reasonings were irrefragable without the formality of syllogism; and his brief, but powerful persuasions went straight to the heart, which the most elaborate discussions might have left unmoved. Every hearer, however illiterate, would at once seize his meaning, except those who found themselves interested in not understanding it; every spectator, "if they believed not him, would believe his works," if pride had not blinded their eyes, if prejudice had not barred up their hearts.

Thus, if in the gospels the great doctrines of religion are not always conveyed in a didactic form, or linked with logi-

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cal arrangement, some important truth meets us at every turn, is held out in some brief sentence; some hint is dropped that may awaken, recal, quicken, or revive perpetual attention. The same spirit pervades every part; we are reminded without being fatigued; and, whatever is the point to be pressed, some informing, alarming, or consoling doctrine is extracted from it, or grows out of it.

The Scriptures, however, are so far from setting aside the use of reason, that all their precepts are addressed to it. If they are delivered in a popular manner, and often in independent maxims, our reason, by combining them, methodizes the detached passages into a perfect system; so that by a combination, which it is in the power of every intelligent reader to make, a complete rule of practice is collected. The scattered precepts are embodied in examples illustrated by figures, and exemplified by parables. These always suppose the mind of the hearer to be possessed of a certain degree of common knowledge, without which the proposed instruction would be unintelligible. For, if the gospel does not address its disciples as if they were philosophers or mathematicians, it always supposes them to possess plain sense and ordinary information; to have acquaintance with human, if not with elevated life. The allusions and imagery with which it abounds would have been superfluous, if the hearers had not been previously acquainted with the objects and circumstances to which the image is referred, from which the parallel is drawn, to which the allusion is made.

Our heavenly Father, in his offers of illumination, does not expect we should open our mental eyes to this superinduced light, without opening our understandings to natural and rational information, but expects that we should apply the faculties bestowed to the objects proposed to them. We put ourselves, therefore, in the fairest way of obtaining his assistance, when we most diligently use all the means and materials he has given us; comparing together his works and his word; not setting up our understanding against his revelation, but, with deep humility, applying the one to enable us to comprehend the other; not extinguishing our faculties, but our pride; not laying our understanding asleep, but casting it at the foot of the cross. We have dwelt on this point the more, from having observed, that some religious persons are apt to speak with contempt of great natural endowments, as if they were not the gift of God, but of some inferior power: the prudently pious, on the other hand, while they use them to the end for which they were conferred, keep them in due

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subordination, and restrict them to their proper office. Abilities are the gift of God, and next to his grace, though with an immense interval, his best gift; but are never so truly estimable as when they are dedicated to promote his glory.

Our heavenly Instructer, still more to accommodate his parables to the capacities of his audience, adopted the broad line of instruction conveyed under a few strong features of general parallel, a few leading points of obvious coincidence, without attending to petty exactnesses, or stooping to trivial niceties of correspondence. We are not, therefore, to hunt after minute resemblances, nor to cavil at discrepancies. We should rather imitate his example, by confining our illustration to the more important circumstances of likeness, instead of raising such as are insignificant into undue distinction. This critical elaboration, this amplifying mode, which ramifies a general idea into all the minutiæ of parallel, would only serve to divert the attention, and split it into so many divisions, that the main object would be lost sight of.

The author once heard a sermon which had for its text, "Ye are the salt of the earth." The preacher, a really good man, but wanting this discretion, not contented with a simple application of the figure, instead of a general allusion to the powerfully penetrating and correcting nature of this mineral, instead of observing that salt was used in all the ancient sacrifices, indulged himself in a wide range, chemical and culinary, of all the properties of salt, devoting a separate head to each quality. A long discussion on its antiseptic properties, its solution and neutralization, led to rather a luxurious exhibition of the relishes it communicates to various viands. On the whole, the discourse seemed better adapted for an audience composed of the authors of the Pharmacopœia, or a society of cooks, than for a plain, untechnical congregation.

But to return.—Who can reflect without admiration on the engaging variety with which the great Teacher labors to impress every important truth? Whenever different aspects of the same doctrine were likely still more forcibly to seize the attention, still more deeply to touch the heart, still more powerfully to awaken the conscience, he does not content himself with a single allegory. In his awful exhibition of the inestimable value of an immortal soul, he does not coolly describe the repentance of a single sinner as viewed with complacency by the highest order of created intelligences, but as adding "joy" to bliss already perfected in immortality. He does not limit his instruction to one metaphorical illustration of the delight of the heavenly hosts, but extends it to three, finish-

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ing the climax by that most endearing and touching of all moral and allegorical pictures, the restoration of the prodigal to his father's love.

But this triple use of the same species of allegory—each instance rising above the other, in beauty and in force, each adding fresh weight to one momentous point—he most emphatically employs in the last discourse previous to his final suffering; we mean in his sublime illustration of the solemnities of the last day, in three successive parables, all tending to impress the same awful truth.

As he well knew every accessible point of the human heart, so there was none which he did not touch. But the grand circumstance which carried his instruction so directly home to the hearts and consciences of men, was, that he not only taught, but "did all things well." His doctrines were so digested into his life, his instructions so melted into his practice, that it rendered goodness visible as well as perfect; and these analogies and resemblances were not only admirably, but uniformly correspondent. He did not content himself, like those heathen philosophers, to whose affable conduct in society that of the blessed Redeemer has lately been so impiously compared, (though their motives differed, as much as the desire of converting sinners differs from delighting in them,) with exhibiting systems without morals, and a rule without a pattern, but the purity and perfection of his divine character gave light to knowledge, and life to document.

CHAP. VI.

On the Parable of the Talents.

Our Lord's parables had been sometimes indicative of existing circumstances; sometimes predictive of events which related to futurity. After having, in his preceding allegories, by practical lessons, encouraged the prepared, and exhorted the unprepared, to look for the kingdom of God, he closed his parabolical* instructions by an awful exhibition of their fitness or unfitness for that everlasting kingdom, in which he unfolds what their condition will be, when all mystery, all instruction, all preparation, shall be at an end: when every act of every being shall be laid as bare before the eyes of the whole assembled world, as it was seen in its commission by

* See Matthew xxv.

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HIS, from whom nothing is hid. The last of these three prophetic scenes is indeed not so much a parable as a picture; not so much an allegory as a literal representation: the solemn reality rises above all figure, and could never have been so forcibly conveyed as by this plain, yet most sublime, delineation.

The conclusion immediately to be drawn from the second of these parables, the parable of the talents, is, that we have nothing that is properly our own, nothing that is underived from God. Every talent is a deposit placed in our hands, not for our exclusive benefit, but for the good of others. Whatever we possess which may either be improved to God's glory or perverted to his dishonor, comes within the description of a talent. To use any of our possessions, therefore, as if we had an independent right to the disposal of them, is to usurp the prerogative of the Giver. Many, it is to be feared, will wait till that great disclosing day which will throw a blaze of light on all motives, as well as all actions, before they will be convinced of the fallacy of that popular maxim, that a man may do what he will with his own. He has indeed a full right to his proprietorship with respect to other men, but, with respect to God, he will find he had no exclusive property. Whatever portion of his possessions conscience ought to have turned over from vanity to charity, from sensuality to piety, he may find, too late, was not his own, but his who gave it him for other purposes.

God proportions his requisitions to his gifts. The one is regulated by the measure of the other. As duties and obligations are peculiar and personal, we are not to trench on the sphere of others. It is of our own talent, we must render our own account. A capacity, however, to know our duty, and to love and serve God, as they are indiscriminately bestowed, so the inquiry into the use made of them will be universal, while the reward or punishment will be individually assigned.

Deficiency and excess are the Scylla and Charybdis between which we seldom steer safely. If our talents are splendid, we are subject to err on the side of display; if mean, totally to suppress their exercise, apologizing for our indolence by our insignificance:—but mediocrity of talents is as insufficient an excuse for sloth, as superior genius is for vanity. The true way would be, to exercise the brightest faculties with humility, and the most inconsiderable with fidelity. The faithful and highly gifted servants in the parable, it is apparent, were so far from being lifted into pride, or

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seduced into negligence, by the greater importance of the trust committed to them, that they considered the largeness of their agency as an augmentation of their responsibility. *They* did the will of their lord without conditioning or debating. Their slothful associate, instead of doing it, contented himself with arguing about it. He who disputed much, had done nothing: he should have known that Christianity is not a matter of debate, but of obedience.

There is no one doctrine of Holy Scripture either insignificant or merely theoretical. That which the parable teaches, is highly and specially practical. The instruction to be deduced from it is as extensive as the gifts of God to his creatures, as the obligations of man to his benefactor. It is most especially practical, as it designates this world to be a scene of business, action, exertion, diligence. It inculcates the high and complicated duty, of laying out ourselves for the glory of our Maker, and the exercise of an implicit obedience to his will. God has not given us the command to work, without furnishing us with instruments with which to labor, and suitable materials to work upon. Our talents, such as *riches*, *power*, *influence*, *wisdom*, *learning*, *time*, are those instruments. The wants, helplessness, and ignorance of mankind, are the objects to which these instruments are to be applied. These talents are bestowed in various proportions, as to their value, as well as in different degrees, as to the quantity and number. He who is favored with more abundant endowments, should mix with his gratitude for the gift, an abiding sense of his own greater accountableness. He who is slenderly furnished, should never plead that the inferiority of his trust is an excuse for his negligence. The conviction that the Great Master will not exact beyond the proportion of his gift, though an encouragement to those whom his providence has placed in a narrow sphere of usefulness, is no discharge from their diligence. Is it reasonable, that he who has less to do, should therefore do nothing? When little is expected from us, not to do that little enhances the crime; and it aggravates the ingratitude, when we convert our Master's more moderate demands into a pretence for absolute supineness.

He who is not called upon to relieve the necessities, or to enlighten the ignorance of others, has still a weighty work upon his hands: he has the care of his own soul. If he is deficient in learning and natural abilities, if he has little credit, and less fortune, he probably has time; he certainly has the means of religious improvement; so that, in this

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land of light and knowledge, especially now that universal instruction is happily become a national care, there is hardly such a thing as innocent ignorance. Even of the lowest, of the least, a strict account will be required. To plead ignorance where they might have been taught, indolence because they had little to do, and negligence, because not much was expected, is only treasuring up innumerable reasons for aggravating their condemnation.

It is remarkable that of the several characters exhibited in the parable, the least endowed was the only one punished, his neglect being every way inexcusable. A lasting and awful lesson, that no inferiority can claim exemption from the general law of duty. If the right employment of the gift is an encouragement to the poorly endowed, as being easily exercised and amply rewarded; its abuse is an awakening call to every one. For, is it not fairly deducible from this instance, that if of those whose scale in society is low, whose intellectual powers are mean, or whose fortunes are narrow; if even of such a strict account will be required, if even in these mere deficiency was so harshly reprobated, mere nullity was so severely punished,—a sentence of most tremendous import must await those who employ rank and opulence to selfish and corrupt ends, or genius to pernicious purposes? the one debasing their own minds by sensuality, or corrupting others by examples of vice and prodigality; the other, devoting abilities so great, with profligacy so notorious, as to appear little less than "archangel ruined," and drawing inferior spirits into the destruction in which they have plunged themselves.

But again:—If these several talents, individually conferred, when employed to wrong purposes, or not employed at all, will be rigorously punished, what sentence have they to expect, in whom is centered the splendid confluence of God's gifts? What will be the eternal anathema pronounced on those who possessed aggregately talents, with every one of which, singly enjoyed, they might have rendered the world about them better and happier? To reflect by whom they were bestowed, to what end designed, how they have been used, and what a reckoning awaits them, forms a combination of reflections too awful to be dwelt upon. From the anticipation of such complicated woe we turn with terror. The bare idea of a punishment which shall always torment, and never destroy, is insupportable. Yet how many believe this without being influenced by the belief! How many, by an unaccountable delusion, refuse to conform their lives to the

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injunctions of the gospel, while they put their vices under the protection of its promises.

The parable informs us, that it was "after a long time," that the Lord required the account; so long, that the wicked think it will never come, and even the good are apt to persuade themselves that it will not come soon. Let not those however who are sitting at ease in their possessions, whether of nature or of fortune, to speak after the manner of men, fancy that the reckoning which is delayed is forgotten. The more protracted the account, the larger will be the sum total, and, of course, the more severe the requisition. All delay, indeed, is an act of mercy; but mercy neglected, or abused, will enhance punishment in proportion as it aggravates guilt.

It is obvious that the servants in the parable had been in the habit of attending to their mercies. They seem never to have been unmindful of the exact value of what had been committed to them: "Lord thou deliveredst unto me five talents." If we do not frequently enumerate the mercies of God to us, we shall be in danger of losing sight of the Giver, while we are revelling in the gift; of neglecting the application, and forgetting the responsibility. We should recollect, that his very employment of us is a high mark of favor; the use he condescends to make of us augments our debt, and whenever he puts it in our way to serve him, he lays on us a fresh obligation, and confers on us an honorable distinction.

Though he that has most, and does most, has but "a few things," yet his remuneration shall be immense. It is his fidelity, and not his success; his zeal in improving occasions, and not the number or greatness of the occasions, that will be rewarded. There will be an always infinite disproportion between the work he has done, and the blessing attending it.

The expostulation of the unprofitable servant presents an awful lesson against distrust in God, and fallacious views of his infinitely perfect character. The very motive this false reasoner produces in his own vindication, is the strongest argument against him. If he "*knew*" that his lord was such a rigorous exactor, that was the very reason why he should not have given in such a negative account. "I knew thou wast a hard master." Could a weightier argument have been advanced for a directly different conduct? Common prudence might have taught him that, with such a master, his only security was assiduous industry. The want of love of God was at the root of this, as it is of all sin.

How many listen to the sentence of this unworthy servant! How many allow the equity of his exclusion, and yet how

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few, comparatively, ask, with the agitated apostles, "Lord, is it I?" This simple question, honestly put, and practically followed up, would render all comment vain, all exhortation superfluous. This self-application is the great end of the parable, the great end of Scripture, the great end of preaching, and the only end of hearing.

But do not too many of us, like him we are so ready to condemn, conceal our self-love under the assumption of modesty, and indulge our sloth under the humble pretence that we have no talent to exercise? But let us be assured it is the deadness of our spiritual affections, and not our mean opinion of ourselves, that is the real cause. The service of God is irksome, because his commands interfere with our self-indulgence. Let the lowly Christian, possessed of but his single talent, cheer his fainting heart by that beautifully condescending plea, with which the compassionate Savior vindicated the modest penitent, who had no other way of demonstrating her affection but by pouring perfumes on his feet—SHE HATH DONE WHAT SHE COULD. A tenderness of encouragement, which, if we consider by whom it was uttered, and to whom addressed, must convey consolation to the heart of the most poorly endowed and self-abasing Christian.

In giving in the final account of the use we have made of our talents, we shall not only have to reckon for the Christian knowledge we really acquired, for the progress we actually made in piety, for the good impressions we received or communicated, but for the higher degrees of all which we might have received or imparted, had we, instead of squandering our talents on inferior objects, carried them to the height of which they were susceptible. Had we acted up to our convictions, had we pushed our advantages to their possibilities, had we regularly pursued what we eagerly engaged in, had our progress kept pace with our resolution, our attainments with our opportunities, how much more profitable servants we might have been! But satisfied to stop short of great offences, we neglect to impress upon our consciences how large a portion of our reckoning will be of a negative character.

From natural feeling, from inward consciousness, from the notices of reason, the traces of hereditary opinion, and the analogy of things, independently of Revelation, we cannot avoid the belief that we are accountable beings. Our notions of right and wrong, of equity and judgment, our insuppressible forebodings, our fearful anticipations, the suggestions of natural conscience, all unite their several forces to fasten on

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the mind the belief that we shall be called to a definite account. Our intelligent nature, our rational powers, our voluntary agency, make us suitable subjects of God's moral government. His wisdom, power, omniscience, rectitude and justice render him supremely fit to be our final judge, and the dispenser of our eternal awards. But God, in his infinite goodness, has not, in this most important point, left us to the bare light of unassisted nature; he has not left us to be tossed about without rudder, or compass, on the boundless ocean of harassing conjecture. He has not abandoned us to the alternation of vain fears and unfounded hopes; to the sickly suggestions of a troubled fancy, the cruel uncertainties of doubt, and the cheerless darkness of ignorance. The expectation of a day of retribution is not the gloomy reverie of the superstitious, nor the wild vision of the enthusiastic. *He who cannot lie* has solemnly assured us, that he has appointed a day in which he will judge the world by that Man whom he has sent, Christ Jesus.

The coming of this great day, which nature suspected, and reason allowed, Scripture confirms. It will at length arrive. The scrutiny so graphically exhibited by our Lord, will be realized in all its pomp of terrors. The sea shall give up its dead, and death and hell shall deliver up the dead which are in them, and every man shall be judged according to his works. And the dead, small and great, shall stand before God, and the judgment shall be set, and the books opened, and the dead shall be judged out of those things which are written in the books, according to their works.

This universal examination into the human character, this critical dissection of the heart of man, from the first created being to him who shall be caught up alive in the air at Christ's second coming, shall infallibly take place.

Blessed be almighty forbearance, it is still in the power of every existing child of Adam to lighten to himself his apprehensions of that day. He may do more; he may convert terror into transport, by acting now as if he really believed it would one day come; by acting as he shall then wish he had acted. If "the terrors of the Lord persuade men," what effect should his mercy produce; that mercy which has given the universal warning to the whole human race in three consentaneous parables, exhibited with a spirit of truth more resembling historic narrative, than prophetic anticipation! There is not one living being who now reads this page from whom that day is distant; to some it must be very near; to none perhaps nearer than to her who now tremblingly pre-

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sumes to raise the warning voice;—to her, to all, it is tremendously awful. Let none of us, then, content ourselves with a barren admiration of its solemnities, as if it were an affecting scene of a tragedy, invented to move the passions without rectifying them; to inspire terror, without quickening repentance. Let us not be struck by it as with a wonderful fact in history, which involves the interest of some one country with which we have no particular concern; or of some remote century disconnected with that in which our lot is cast. It is the personal, the individual, the everlasting concern of every rational being through all the rolls of time, till time shall be no more. It is the final, unalterable decision on the fate of every intelligent, and, therefore, every accountable creature, to whom God has revealed his will; to whom he has sent his Son, to whom he has offered the aid of his Spirit.

No wonder that the universal administration of final justice shall be manifested in the most awful pomp and splendor; no wonder that it will be equally a scene of anguish and of transport; when it will, on the one hand, as much exceed the terrors of guilt, as it will, on the other, transcend the hopes of faith—when the eternal Son of the eternal Father, in the full brightness of his glory, shall be the judge; when the whole assembled universe shall be the subjects of judgment—when not only the deeds of every life, but the thoughts of every heart, shall be brought to light; when, if *we* produce our works, the recording book will produce our motives—when every saint who acted as seeing Him who is invisible, shall not only see but share the glory in which he trusted; when the hypocrite shall behold him whom he believed without trusting, and mocked without deceiving; when the profligate shall witness the reality of what he feared, and the infidel shall feel the certainty of what he denied.

CHAP. VII.

On Influence, considered as a Talent.

It is at best but a selfish sort of satisfaction, though the poet calls it a delightful one, *to see others tossed about in a storm, while we are sitting in security, rejoicing, not because they are in danger, but because we are safe.* Christianity instructs us to improve on the sentiment. It teaches us to extract not only comfort and gratification from the comparison of our

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happier lot with that of the less favored; but in making the comparison, it reminds us to make it with reference to God, by emphatically asking, "Who is it that maketh us to differ?"

But if we look around, not only on the external but on the moral and mental distinctions among mankind, and consider the ignorance, the miseries, and the vices of others as a ground for our more abundant gratitude; what sort of feeling will be excited in certain persons by a sight and sense of those miseries, those vices, and that ignorance, of which their own influence, or example, or neglect has been the cause? If we see any unhappy whom we might have relieved, any ignorant whom we ought to have instructed, any corrupt whose corruptions we never endeavored to reform, but whom, perhaps, we have contributed to make what they are; in either of these cases, it is difficult to conceive any state of mind less susceptible of comfort, any circumstance more calculated to excite compunction. These instances may help men to a pretty just criterion by which to judge of their own character, since it is certain *they* never felt any true gratitude for their own mercies, who can look with indifference on either the temporal or spiritual distresses of others. And if no one ever truly mourned for his own sins who can be insensible to the sins of those around him, so no one can be earnest to promote his own salvation, who neglects any fair opening of contributing to the salvation of others.

What an appalling reflection it is, that at the tremendous bar, a being already overwhelmed with the weight of his own offences, may have to sustain the addition of the amazing and unexpected load of all those, of which he has been the cause in others! What an awful contrast will be presented to the assembled universe, when certain commanding characters shall stand forth, burdened not only with their personal guilt, nor even with the sins of their immediate connections, but in a certain measure with the sins of their age and country; while others, who devoted similar talents and influence to opposite purposes, shall appear gloriously surrounded with happy spirits, of whose felicity they have been the instruments; their shining crowns made brighter by imparted brightness, by goodness which flourished under their auspices, by virtues which were the effect of their patronage, by piety which was the fruit of their example.

Influence is a talent not only of undefinable but of universal extent. Who is there so insignificant as not to have his own circle, greater or smaller, made better or worse by his

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society, his conduct, his counsels? That presumptuous but common consolation of a dying bed, *I have done no harm to any one*, is always the fallacious refuge of such as have done little or no good. Man is no such neutral being.

It is not the design of the present considerations to insist so much on the more striking and conspicuous instances of misemployed influence, (for the ordinary state of life does not incessantly call them into action,) as on those overlooked, though not unimportant demands for its exertion, which occur in the every-day transactions of mankind, more especially among the opulent and the powerful.

Rank and fortune confer an influence the most commanding. All objects attract the more notice from being placed on an eminence, and do not excite the less attention, because they may deserve less admiration. In anticipating the scrutiny that will hereafter be made into the manner in which the rich and great have employed their influence, that powerful engine put into their hands for the noblest purposes, may we not venture to wish they had some disinterested friend, less anxious to please than to serve them, who would honestly, as occasion might offer, interrogate them in a manner something like the following?—

"Allow me, as a friend to your immortal interests, to ask you a few plain questions. Has your power been uniformly employed in discouraging injustice; in promoting particular as well as general good; in countenancing religious as well as charitable institutions; in protecting the pious, as well as in assisting the indigent? Has your influence been conscientiously exerted in vindicating injured merit; has it been employed in defending insulted worth against the insolence of the unfeeling, the scorn of the unworthy, the neglect of the unthinking? Has it been exercised in patronizing modest genius, which would, without your fostering hand, have sunk in obscurity?

"Have you, in the recommendations which have been required of you, had an eye to the suitableness of the candidate for the place, rather than to a provision for an unworthy applicant, to the injury of the office? And have you honestly preferred the imperative claims of the institution to the solicitations, or even to the wants, of the individual? Have you never loaded a public, or injured a private, establishment, by appointing an unfit agent, because he was a burden on your own hands, or a charge on your own purse? Have you never promoted a servant who had 'wasted your goods,' and with whom you parted for that very reason, to the superin-

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tendence of a charity, or to the management of an office, where you knew he would have a wider sphere, and a more uncontrolled power of purloining public property, or wasting private bounty, than in that from which your prudence had discharged him?"

To rise a step higher:—"Have you never, if intrusted with a patronage over that peculiarly sacred office, 'which any one may well tremble to give or to receive,' been governed by a spirit of despotism in the disposal of it, which you perhaps severely censure under a certain other establishment most obviously corrupt? Have you never been engaged in promoting men, who, from their destitution of principle, are a dishonor to the profession in which you have been raising them, or, by the want of abilities, are disqualified for it? Have you never connived at the preferment of the weak or the wicked, to the exclusion of others whose virtues and talents eminently fitted them for the situation? Or have you, rather, strenuously labored to fix the meritorious in the place they were so qualified to fill, while you supplied the wants of the undeserving or incompetent relative out of your own purse? And have you habitually made a conscience of recommending adequate persons in preference to the unworthy and the unfit, though the latter belonged to your own little senate, or swelled your own large train?

"Have you habitually borne in mind that important, but disregarded maxim, that what you do by another is done by yourself; and not only carefully avoided oppression in your own person, but, rising superior to that selfish indolence, the bane, the grave of every nobler quality, have you been careful that your agents do not exercise a tyranny which you yourself abhor, but which may be carried on under your name? Your ignorance of such injustice will be of little avail, if, through supineness, you have sanctioned abuses which vigilance might have prevented, or exertion punished.

"Have you unkindly denied access to your presence to the diffident solicitor, who has no other channel to preferment but your favor; and if not able to serve him, have you softened your refusal by feelingly participating in his disappointment, instead of aggravating it by refusing to see and soothe him, when you could do no more? Have you considered that to listen to wearisome applications and pertinacious claims, is among the drawbacks of comfort necessarily appended to your station? To examine into interfering pretensions, while it is a duty you owe to the applicant, is a salutary exercise of patience to yourself; it is also the only certain means you

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possess of distinguishing the meritorious from the importunate."

We dwell on this part of the subject the more earnestly, because it is to be feared that even the tender-hearted and the benevolent, from the facility of a yielding temper, from weariness of importunity, from a wish to spare their own feelings, as well as from a too natural desire to get rid of trouble, are frequently induced to confer and to refuse favors, not only against their principles and their judgment, but against their will. Yet as no virtue is ever possessed in perfection by him who is destitute of its opposite, have you been equally careful, never, for the sake of popularity or the love of ease, to awaken false hopes, and keep alive false expectations in your retainers, though you knew you had no prospect of ever making them good?—thus committing your own honor for the sake of swelling the catalogue of your dependents; and, by insincerity and indecision, feeding them with delusive promises, when a firm negative, by extinguishing hope, might have put them on a more successful pursuit.

Some striking instances of delicate liberality, recorded of a late lamented statesman, have shown, that it is not too much to expect from human nature, that a man should exert his influence for the benefit of another, even though it were to his own disadvantage, and that he should be not only willing, but desirous, not to procure for himself the gratitude of the obliged person, nor to obtain his admiration; but would be contented, that, while he himself afforded all the benefit, an intervening agent should have all the credit. This disinterestedness is among the nicer criteria of a Christian spirit.

While we can with truth assign the most liberal praise to that spirit of charity which pre-eminently distinguishes the present period, we are compelled to lament that justice is not held in equal estimation by some of those who give the law to manners. This considerably diminishes their influence, because it is the quality which, of all others, they most severely require in their dependents, as being that which is most immediately connected with their own interest. And how far from equitable is it, to blame and punish the statutable offence in petty men, whose breach of integrity is unhappily facilitated by continual opportunity, or induced by the pressure of want, while the rigorous exacter of justice is as defective in the practice, as he is strict in the requisition?

The species of injustice alluded to, consists much in that laxity of principle which admits of a scale of expense disproportioned to the fortune: this creates the inevitable necessity

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of remaining in heavy arrears to those who can ill afford to give long credit: in return, it induces in the creditor the habit, and almost the necessity, of enhancing the price of his commodity. The evil would be little, if the encroachment were only felt by those whose tardy payment renders exorbitance almost pardonable: but others, who practise the most exact justice, are involved in the penalty, without partaking in the offence; and the correct are taxed for the improbity of the dilatory. This dilapidating habit leads to an indolence in inspecting accounts; and the increasing unwillingness to examine into debts, increases the inability to discharge them; for debts, like sins, become more burdensome in proportion as people neglect to inquire into them. Perhaps there is no instance of misconduct which tends more directly to diminish influence than the imprudence of contracting debts, and the irregularity and consequent injustice of which it is sometimes unintentionally the cause.

And here, if we might be allowed a remark somewhat foreign to our immediate subject, it may be observed, that the low conception of justice of which we complain has infected not only morals, but religion; or rather, what began in our principle towards God, extends to our practice towards man. It is the attribute of which we make the least scruple to rob the Almighty; for it is a fashionable, though covert, mode of arraigning his justice, when we affect to exalt his character by representing him as too merciful to punish. Justice is not only eminently conspicuous in her own central station, but gives life and light to other attributes. By cutting off superfluous expenses, temperance and sobriety grow out of justice; and what is subtracted from luxury is carried over, without additional expense, to the account of beneficence.

The Holy Scriptures lay down some precise and indispensable rules for the practice of justice, while they leave great latitude, at least as to the selection of its individual acts, to charity. Justice can be maintained only by this distinct demand and rigid acquiescence, while charity would lose the nature and quality of benevolence, if it were under any such express and definite rules. Charity may choose her object, but those of justice are chosen for her. It was, doubtless, in mercy, that no absolute rule or limitation is made respecting charity, that we might have the gratification of a voluntary delight in its exercise; for our nature is, in this respect, so kindly constituted, that, in minds not peculiarly ill-formed, the call to beneficence is the call to enjoyment.

But to return.—The influence of the great, "the observed

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of all observers," descends into the social walks of life. The pinnacle on which they stand, makes their most trivial actions, and even words, objects of attention and imitation to those beneath them. The consciousness of this should be an additional motive for avoiding, in their ordinary conversation, not only what is corrupt, but whatever savors of levity and imprudence; the vanity of the little world is ready, not from mischief, but self-importance, to convert the thoughtless slips of the great into consequence; their most frivolous remarks are quoted, merely that the quoter may seize the only occasion he could ever find of showing that he has been admitted to their company. This harmless little stratagem holds out a strong motive for those whose condition in life makes them subjects of observation, occasionally to let fall something that may be remembered, not merely because they said it, but because it was worth saying. This remark applies to superiority of talents, to be considered in our next head, still more than of rank.

As the great and noble are sufficiently disposed to look with reverted eye back to their ancestral honors, it were to be wished that they were all as ready, as we are happy to say some of them are, to cast the same careful retrospect to the ancient usages of their illustrious houses. There was a time when family devotion was considered as a kind of natural appendage to high rank, when domestic worship was almost as inseparably connected with the aristocracy, as the church with the state. The chapel was as much a part of the splendid establishment as the state-room. When the form of piety was thus kept up, the reality was more likely to exist. Even the appearance was a homage to religion, the very custom was an honorable recognition of Christianity. But, in the way of influence, it must have been of high importance; the domestics would have their sense of duty kept alive, and would with more alacrity serve those who they saw served God. It was a bond of political, as well as of moral union; it was the only occasion on which "the rich and poor meet together." There is something of a coalescing property in social worship. In acknowledging their common dependence on their common Master, this equality of half an hour would be likely to promote subordination through the rest of the day. Take it in an inferior point of view, it was a useful discipline, it was a family muster-roll, a sort of domestic parade, which regularly brought the privates before their commanding officers, and maintained order as well as detected absence. It was also calculated to promote the interests of

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the superiors, by periodically reminding their dependents of their duty to God, which necessarily involves every human obligation.

We come now to speak, though cursorily, of another deposit of talent, not less extensive in its immediate effects, and far more important in its consequences—the influence of genius and learning. As the influence of well-directed talents is too obvious to require animadversion, we shall confine our brief remarks to their contrary direction. If we could suppose the man whose talents had, by pernicious principles, been diverted from their right channel, to have, at the close of life, that clear view of his own character, and the misapplication of his mental powers, which will be presented to him when he opens his eyes on eternity, we should witness as complete a contrast with his present feelings as any two opposite descriptions of character could exhibit.

Of all the various sentences to be awarded at the dread tribunal, can imagination figure one more severe than will be pronounced against the polluted and polluting wit; the noblest faculties turned into arms against him who gave them, the eloquence which would scarcely have disparaged the tongue of angels, converted to the rhetoric of hell? The mischief of a corrupt book is indefinite, both in extent and duration. When the personal example of the writer has done its worst, and has only ruined his friends and neighbors, the operation of an unprincipled work may be but just beginning. It is a sin, the commission of which carries in it more of the character of its infernal inspirer than any other. It is a crime not prompted by appetite, kindled by passion, or provoked by temptation: but a gratuitous, voluntary, cold-blooded enormity, the offspring of intellectual wickedness, the child of spiritual depravity; the deepest sin without the slightest excuse. Sins of surprise have infirmity to plead, but, in this frigid villany, the badness of the motive keeps pace with the turpitude of the act. The *intention* is to offend God, the *project* is to ruin man; the *aim* is to poison the temporal peace, the *design* is to murder the everlasting hope of all who come in contact with it.

But the exclusive application of talents to subjects perfectly unexceptionable, and right and valuable, as far as they go, is sometimes an occasion in which we might mingle regret with admiration. We view with reverence the profound scholar, a man, so far from having lost any time in trifling, whose very amusements are labors, and whose relaxation is intensity of thought, and sedulity of study. By unremitting diligence,

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he has been daily adding fresh stores to his ponderous mass of erudition, or periodically presenting new tomes to the literary world, in return for those he has rifled. But, put the case, that such a man has never so much as conceived the thought of lending to religion his weight of character, or the influence of his reputation, by devoting some little interval to a moral or religious speculation; has never once entertained the idea of occasionally directing his treasures of learning into any channel which leads to the country where he and his volumes together, the durable register of his life, are soon about to land,—who can forbear, in the contemplation of such a possible character, regretting that his too moderate ambition should be satisfied with the applause of an age or an island, without once exercising his talents on some topic which might have included the concerns of his whole species, which might have embraced the interests of both worlds? Who can forbear lamenting, that he has risen so high without reflecting that, in a moral sense, "one step higher would set him highest;" that he should have been contented with the idolatrous worship of some pagan sage as editor or annotator; and, for that humble meed, to relinquish the duty of glorifying his Maker, by instructing his fellow-creatures; as if that were a less splendid object, an inferior concern to be turned over to inferior abilities, and to which inferior abilities were adequate?

If the awful apprehension of a future account could, at the close of life, lead even the illustrious Grotius, who had with equal ability cultivated both secular and sacred studies, to wish that he could change characters with a poor pious peasant, who used to spend most of his time in reading the Bible at his gate, what may finally be the wish of those who, having quitted a far less useful life without any such contrite confession, are brought to *witness* at once the retribution assigned to the conscientious use of one solitary talent, and to *feel* that awarded to their own vast but abused allotment? That awakening parable of the Divine Teacher which presents so terrible a view of the "great gulf" which irrevocably separated two other neighbors, whose respective lots in worldly circumstances resembled the distinctions of intellect in the preceding instance—that "gulf" which eternally divided the holy beggar from the opulent sensualist—is equally applicable to the present case. If any thing could deepen or widen a barrier already hopelessly impassable, might it not be the substitution of ill-applied abilities for misemployed riches?*

* Let no one apply this to the great statesman of Holland.

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An affecting thought involuntarily forces itself upon us, on the departure of distinguished genius. All those shining talents which had hitherto too exclusively filled our minds, sink at once in our estimation, because we know they are now nothing to their possessor but as they were used, worse than nothing if they were not used wisely. In the court where he now stands for trial, neither the cogent argument nor the pointed wit can secure his acquittal; happy if they appear not strong evidences against it. The qualities of his heart, which perhaps, dazzled by those of his head, we had not taken into the account—his errors having been lost in his brightness—now come forward as the others recede. Our feelings are solely occupied with what may be now available to him to whom we have owed pleasure or information. That fame which we lately thought so solid a good, seems now a painted cloud melting into air; that proud FOREVER for which he wrote, seems dwindled to a point; that visionary immortality which he had assigned as his meed, compared with the eternity on which he has entered, is become less than the shadow to the substance, less than the halo to the sun.

This idea strikes the mind with peculiar force, upon the recent decease of two writers of uncommon reach of thought, profound research, and unbounded philological learning. Had these two eminent men been possessed of inferior minds, or a more dubious fame, their death would have sounded the signal of silence, no less to the moralist than to the satirist, as to the gross sensuality and corrupt principles of the one, the avowed atheism and profligate political doctrines of the other. As it is, we cannot but refer to them, though with feelings of pungent regret, and only under a strong sense of the atonement which such examples owe to the world for the mischief they do it, as a melancholy illustration of some of the preceding remarks. It is to be feared that the unmixed commendation of their talents and erudition, without the gentlest censure of their principles and practices, with which some of our journals abounded on the loss of these able but unhappy men, might tend to impress the ardent youthful student with an overvaluation of genius, unsanctified by Christian principles, of erudition undignified by virtuous conduct.

Far, very far, from my heart be the ungenerous thought of treating departed eminence with disrespect; but in analyzing striking characters, is it not a duty to separate "the precious from the vile," lest unqualified admiration, where there is

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such large room for censure, should, while profusely embalming the dead allure the ingenuous living to an imitation as unlimited as the panegyric was undistinguishing?*

CHAP. VIII.

On Time, considered as a Talent.

If we already begin to feel what a large portion of life we have improvidently squandered—what days and nights have been suffered to waste themselves, if not criminally, yet inconsiderately; if not loaded with evil, yet destitute of good—how much time has been consumed in worthless employments, frivolous amusements, listless indolence, idle reading, and vain imaginations—if things already begin to appear wrong, which we once thought at least harmless, though not perhaps useful,—what appearance will they assume in that inevitable hour when all things will be seen in their true light, and appreciated according to their intrinsic value? We shall then feel in its full force how often we neglected what we knew to be our duty, shunned what we were aware was our interest, and declined what we yet believed would add to our happiness; while, with perverted energy, we eagerly pursued what we had reason to think was contrary to our interest, duty, and happiness. But excuses satisfy us now, to which we shall not then give the hearing for a moment. The thin disguise which the illusion of the senses now casts over vanity, sloth, and error, will then be as little efficient as consolatory.

He who carefully governs his mind will conscientiously regulate his time. To him who thus accurately distributes it, who appropriates the hour to its due employment, life will never seem tedious, yet counted by this moral arithmetic it will be really long. If we compute our time as critically as our other possessions; if we assign its proportions to its duties, though the divisions will then be so fully occupied that they will never drag, yet the aggregate sum will be found sufficiently long for all the purposes to which life is destined.

It is not a little absurd that they who most wish to abolish time would be the least willing to abridge life. But is it not

* To prevent any mistaken application of these remarks, it may be proper to avow that professor Porson and Mr. Horne Tooke are the persons to whom they allude.

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unreasonable to endeavor to annihilate the parcels of which life is composed, and at the same time to have a dread of shrinking the stock? They who most pathetically lament the want of time, are either persons who plunge themselves into unnecessary concerns, or those who manage them ill, or those who do nothing. The first create the deficiency they deplore; the second do not so much want time as arrangement; the last, like brute animals laden with gold, groan under the weight of a treasure of which they make no use, and do not know the value.

They will never make a right use of time who turn it over to chance, who live without any definite scheme for its employment, or any fixed object for its end. Such desultory beings will be carried away by every trifle that strikes the senses, or any whim that seizes the imagination. They who live without any ultimate point in view, can have no regular process in the steps which lead to it.

But though in order to prevent confusion, to animate torpor, and tame irregularity, it is always a duty to form a plan, occasions will arise when it may be a higher duty to break it. Both ourselves and our plans must ever be kept subject to the will of a higher power. That is an ill-regulated mind which wears life away without any settled scheme of action; that is a little mind which makes itself a slave to any preconceived rule, when a more imperative duty may arise to demand its infraction. Providence may call us to some work during the day which we did not foresee in the morning. Even a good design must be relinquished to make way for a better; nor must we sacrifice a useful to a favorite project, nor must we scruple to renounce our inclinations at the call of duty or of necessity, for God loves a cheerful doer as well as a "cheerful giver."

In our use of time we frequently practise a delusion which cheats us of no inconsiderable portion of its actual enjoyment. The *now* escapes us while we are settling future points not only of business, of ease, or of pleasure, but of benevolence, of generosity, of piety. These imaginary points to which we impatiently stretch forward in idea, we fix at successive but distant intervals, endeavoring by the rapid march of a hurrying imagination to annihilate the intervening spaces. One great evil of reckoning too absolutely on marked periods which may never arrive, is, that, by this absorption of the mind, we neglect present duties in the anticipation of events not only remote but uncertain. Even if the anticipated period does arrive, it is not always applied to the purpose to which

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it was pledged; and the event which was to feel the full weight of our interference and commanding influence, when it has taken place, sinks into the undistinguished mass of time and circumstances. The point which we once thought, if it ever could be attained, would supply abundant matter, not only for present duty or pleasure, but for delightful retrospection, loses itself, as we mingle with it, in the common heap of forgotten things; and as we recede from it, merges in the dim obscure of faded recollection. Having arrived at the era, instead of seizing on that *present* so impatiently desired while it was *future*, we again send our imagination out to fresh distances in search of fresh deceits. While we are pushing it on to objects still more remote, the large uncalculated spaces of comfort and peace, or of languor and discontent, which fill the chasm, and which we scarcely think worth taking into the account, make up far the greater part of life.

All this would be only foolish, and would hardly deserve a harsher name, if these large uncultivated wastes, these barren interstices, these neglected subdivisions, had not all of them imperious demands of their own, if they were not to be as rigorously accounted for, as the vivid spots and shining prospects which promise so much and produce so little.

Let us not then compute time by particular periods or signal events. Let us not content ourselves with putting our festal days only into the calendar, but remember that from the hour when reasons begins to operate, to the hour in which it shall be extinguished, every particle of time is valuable; that no day can be insignificant, when every day is to be accounted for; that each one possesses weight and importance, because of each the retribution is to be received. In the prospect therefore of our coming time, let us not make great leaps from the expectation to the occurrence; but bearing in mind that small concerns make up the larger share of life, let us aim to execute well those which lie more immediately before us. For the instant occasion we have life and time in hand, for that which is prospective, we may no longer be in possession of either; and it is an argument of no small cogency, that he who devotes time to its best purposes, secures eternity for its best enjoyments.

But we are guilty of the strange inconsistency of being most prodigal of what we best love, and of throwing away what we most fear to lose, that time of which life is made up. If God does not give us a short time, we can contrive to make it short by this wretched husbandry. It is not so

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much indigence of time as a prodigality in the waste of it, that prevents life from answering all the ends for which it is given. Few things make us so independent of the world as the prudent disposition of this precious article. It delivers people from hanging on the charity of others to emancipate them from the slavery of their own company. We should not only be careful not to waste our own time, but that others do not rob us of it. The distinction of crime between "stealing our purse" and "stealing our good name" has been beautifully contrasted. That the purse is "trash" is a sentiment echoed by many who yet set no small value on the trash so liberally condemned; while the waster of his own, or the pilferer of another's time, escapes a censure which he ought more heavily to incur. It is a felony for which no repentance can make restitution, the commodity being not only invaluable but irrecoverable.

Considerable evil, with respect to the economy of time, arises from an error which infects some minds of a superior cast—a notion that contempt of order and custom are indications of genius, that great minds cannot be tied to times, nor enslaved by seasons. They value themselves on being systematic only in their disdain of method, on being regular in nothing but irregularity; with them accident gives the law to action. They pride themselves in not despatching business but postponing it, and this in order to show with what ability they can retrieve time, to which they are always in arrears. From this vanity of intimating that they can execute in hours what costs slower souls days or weeks, the most pressing business is deferred to some indefinite period, and duties thus postponed are not seldom omitted.

The same confidence in his own powers which leads a young man of genius to believe he can catch knowledge by intuition, see every thing at a glance, and comprehend every thing in a moment, tempts him to put off that moment. But if such wonders are really to be achieved without the old ingredients time and study, what might he not expect would be accomplished with their assistance? Those who are now marvels would then be miracles! The too common consequence of this impatience of application, is to affect to despise whatever knowledge requires time to attain, and to consider whatever demands industry to acquire, as not worth acquiring.

Nor is this error monopolized by talents. We have known some, who, having no other evidence of genius to produce, never failed to be unpunctual. It is a wonder that the more intellectual, seeing their province thus invaded by dunces, do

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not become regular through mere contempt of their imitators, and abandon the abuse of time to those who know not how to spend it wisely.

Christianity is a social principle. He who has discovered the use of time, and consequently the value of eternity, cannot but be solicitous for the spiritual good of his fellow-creatures. The one, indeed, is indicative of the other. But this good, like every other, is not without its dangers. We cannot essentially benefit people without associating with them, without rendering ourselves agreeable to them. But in so doing we should ever recollect that we may seek to please till we forget to serve them, we may soften strong truths to render them more palatable, till we come gradually less to recommend *them* than ourselves. In the spirit of friendly accommodation we may insensibly lower the standard of religion, with a view to make ourselves more agreeable, and may deceive in order to conciliate.

Or we may fall into another error. We may begin at the wrong end. We may censure the wrong practice without any reference to the principle, or we may suit our counsels, not to the wants, but to the taste, of our friend. In our endeavors to promote the good of others, we should be careful to find out the points in which they are most deficient. If their error be ignorance of Scripture, if worldliness, if prejudice, if a general disinclination to seriousness, if a blind respect for religion, joined to an unacquaintedness with its doctrines; in each case, a very different mode of conduct will be requisite. In each, in all, we should, indeed, with the utmost fairness, lay open the whole scheme of Christianity, neither concealing its difficulties, its humbling requisitions, nor the self-denials it imposes. But at the same time, if we suspect any one truth to be particularly revolting to them, it will be more prudent to approach this truth gradually through others, from which they are less averse, than, by forcing its introduction at the outset, shut up the way to farther progress. Every doctrine should be unfolded gradually, judiciously, temperately, not insisting on any points that are not clearly scriptural, nor on any that admit of doubtful disputation, nor on many points at a time; and, above all, on none unseasonably, or unceasingly.

This habit of turning time to account, by endeavoring to be useful to others, will, if conducted with mildness, and exercised with Christian humility, be eminently beneficial to ourselves. It will set us on a closer examination of the truths we suggest; and in contending with blindness and self-suffi-

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ciency, we shall find a wholesome exercise for our own patience and moderation. It may remind us, that we were once, perhaps, in the same state. Above all, it will put us on a more strict watchfulness over our own hearts and lives, lest we should be adopting one set of principles for our conversation, and another for our conduct. It will induce the necessity of a more exact consistency, as they to whom we are counsellors will not be backward, if we furnish them with the least ground, to be our censurers.

And here I would affectionately suggest to my numerous amiable young friends, the benefit to be derived to their own minds from turning a certain portion of their time to the personal instruction of the poor, for which so wide a field is just now providentially opened. In communicating the elements of religious knowledge, in numberless repetitions of the same plain truths, in being obliged to begin again the simple document which they fancied they had long ago impressed, in the humbling necessity of lowering their ideas, and debasing their language, in order to make themselves intelligible, in the forbearance which dullness of intellect, perverseness of temper, and ingratitude demand, they may gain some proficiency themselves, even where their success with others is least encouraging.

But to whatever account we turn our time with respect to others, the first object of its right employment is with ourselves; and this not only in discharging those exercises of piety and virtue, which are too obvious and too generally acknowledged to require to be specified; but in attending to the secret dispositions of the mind, in order to ascertain its real character. We do not mean to imply that we can judge of its state by the thoughts which are necessarily suggested by any actual business, or any pressing object, such thoughts being the proper demand of the occasion, and not any certain indication of our abiding state and habitual temper. But by watching the nature and tendency of our spontaneous thoughts, we may, in a great measure, determine on the character of our minds; their voluntary thoughts and unprompted feelings being the streams which indicate the fountain whence they flow. The heart is that perennial spring; for, whether grace or nature supply the current, the fountain is inexhaustible. In either case, the more abundantly it flows, the more constantly its waste is fed by fresh supplies; expense, instead of exhausting, augments the stream, whether the source from earth supply worldly thoughts, or that from above such as

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are heavenly. Thoughts determine on the character; *as the man thinketh, so is he.*

What a scene will open upon us, when, from our eternal state, we shall look back on the use we have made of time! What a revolution will be wrought in our opinions! What a contrast will be exhibited, when we shall take a clear retrospect of all we have done, and all we ought to have done! And shall we, then, put off the inspection to an uncertain period, to a period when we can neither repent to any purpose for what was wrong, nor begin to do what we shall then perceive would have been right? Let these frequent meditations on death, lead us to reflect what the feelings of a dying bed will be. Let us think now what will then be the review of riches misspent, of talents neglected or perverted, of influence abused, of learning misapplied, of time misemployed! To entertain serious thoughts of death now, is the most likely method for rectifying tempers, for conquering propensities, for establishing principles, for confirming habits, of which we shall then feel the consequences; for relinquishing enterprises and pursuits, for the success of which we may then be as much afflicted, as we should now be at their defeat.

He who cannot find time to consult his Bible, will find, one day, that he has time to be sick; he who has no time to pray, must find time to die. He who can find no time to reflect, is most likely to find time to sin; he who cannot find time for repentance, will find an eternity in which repentance will be of no avail. Let us, then, under the influence of the divine spirit, seriously reflect, under what law we came into the world: "it is appointed for all men once to *die*, and after death, the JUDGMENT." Is it not obvious, then, that the design of life is to prepare for judgment; and that in proportion as we employ time well, we make immortality happy?

CHAP. IX

On Charity.

IN that general use of the talents, suggested in the parable, there is also a particular vocation, on the exercise of which every man must equitably determine. Each is particularly called upon to acquit himself of that more immediate duty, for the practice of which God has given special endowments and opportunity. Our Maker requires the spe-

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cific exercise of the specific talent. The nature of the gift points out the nature of the requisition. The use of the endowment is a peculiar debt, a marked obligation. This is not a gift confounded with the mass of his gifts, but one by which God designs to be, by that individual, more remarkably glorified.

But *charity* is a virtue of all times and all places. It is not so much an independent grace in itself, as an energy, which gives the last touch and highest finish to every other, and resolves them all into one common principle. It is called "the very bond of perfectness," not only because it unites us to God, our ultimate perfection, but because it ties all the other virtues together, and refers them, thus concatenated, to him, their common source and centre.

St. Peter having given a pressing exhortation to many exalted duties, finishes by ascribing to charity this emphatical superiority: "*Above all things*, have fervent charity." It is, indeed, the prolific principle of all duty; a confluence of every thing that is lovely and amiable; the fountain from which all excellencies flow, the stream in which they all meet. It is not subject to the ebb and flow of passion or partiality; it is true Christian sympathy. It is tender without weakness; it does not arise from that constitutional softness which may be rather infirmity than virtue. It is the affection of the gospel; a love derived from the Spirit of Christ, and reciprocally communicated among his genuine followers.

Charity comprehends an indefinitely wide sphere, both in feeling and doing. According to the arrangement of St. Paul, in his beautiful personification of this grace,* she may be said to embrace almost the whole scheme of religious, personal, and social duty. "Patient and kind," she does not wait to be solicited to acts of benignity, she seizes the occasion—she does more, she watches for it. She "endures" evils, but inflicts none; she does not select her trials, but "bears all things." Though "she believes all things," yet she exercises her hope without relinquishing her prudence; sometimes, where conviction forbids her thinking favorably, even then it does not prevent "her hoping all things." She subdues "vaunting," conquers the swellings of insolence, and the intractableness of pride. Not only "she envieth not," not only she disallows the injustice of desiring what is another's, but, by a noble disdain of selfishness, she even "seeketh not her own." Her disinterestedness stirs her up to the perpetual rooting out that principle wrought by nature into

* First Epistle to the Corinthians, chap. xiii.

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the constitution of the soul. So far from thinking it a proof of spirit to resent injuries, she is not "easily provoked" by them. She smooths the fierceness of the irascible, and corrects the acrimony of the evil-tempered. She not only does not perpetrate, but "she thinketh no evil." She has found a shorter way of becoming rich than avarice ever invented, for charity makes another's goods her own by a simple process; without dispossessing the proprietor, she rejoices so much in another's prosperity that it becomes hers, because it is his.

Here we see that the apostle places charity not only before all the virtues which he thus gracefully marshals, before qualities the most moral, gifts the most spiritual, attainments the most intellectual, but he actually degrades these last in the comparison; he does not barely lower their value, he annihilates it. Without this principle of life, this soul of duty, this essence of goodness, they are not only little, they are nothing. Without charity, possessions, talents, exertions, are all fruitless. They are of no value in the sight of God: they are of no efficacy to our salvation. Charity alone sanctifies our offerings, recommends our prayers, and makes our very praises acceptable.

And though nothing is formally efficacious but the blood and merits of Christ, yet charity, as a divine grace, and one that will never cease, shows that our interest in him, and union with him, are real and genuine.

But to descend to the particulars of charity, and apply the different branches of it to the common purposes of life.—Whenever we are promoting the good of mankind, either by assisting public institutions, or relieving individuals, we are obviously helping on the cause of charity; and when we cannot effectively assist the work, we may exercise the principle; we may pray for the happiness which we cannot confer, and rejoice in every addition to the general good towards which we cannot contribute. On the other hand, the purse may sometimes be open where the heart is shut. And it is perhaps a more rare and a higher virtue to exercise forbearance towards the faults, and to put a candid construction on the actions of others, than to supply their wants, or promote their temporal interests. But whether candor in judging, or liberality in giving, be the virtue in exercise, by the adoption of each as a law, and the practice of both on the ground of conformity to the divine will, we shall acquire such a habit of exercising the kind affections, that what was adopted as a principle will be established into a pleasure: what was a force upon nature, will almost grow into a part of it; obliga-

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tion will become choice, law impulse, duty necessity; the energy will become so powerful, that the heart will involuntarily spring to the performance; indolence, selfishness, trouble, inconvenience, will vanish under the vigorous operation of a habit whose motive is genuine Christianity.

One Christian grace is never exercised at the expense of another, nor is it perfect unless it promotes that other. Thus charity enjoys abstinently that she may give liberally. While she restrains every wrong inclination, she stimulates us to such as are right. She is never a solitary quality, but is inseparably linked with truth and equity. She leads us perpetually to examine our means, dispositions, and opportunities, and to exert their combined force for the promotion of the greatest possible good. She teaches us to contribute to the comfort of others as well as to their necessities. She converts small kindnesses into great ones, by doing them with reference to God; for it is not so much the worth, as the temper, which will render them acceptable to him.

We must not judge of our charity by single acts and particular instances, for they are not always good men who do good things, but by our general tendencies and propensities. We must strive after an uniformity in our charity—examine whether it be equable, steady, voluntary, and not a charity of times, and seasons, and humors. If we are as unkind and illiberal in one instance as we are profuse in another, when the demand is equal, and we have both the choice and the means, whatever we may be, we are not charitable.

Though charity, as we have already observed, is a quality of universal application, and by no means limited within the narrow bounds of almsgiving, yet not to allow a due, that is, a high rank and station to those works of benevolence, to which our Redeemer gives so conspicuous a place in his exhibition of the scrutiny at the general judgment, would be mistaking the genius of Christianity, would be departing from the practice and the principles of its Founder; it would be forgetting the high dignity he conferred on this grace, when he declared that he should consider the smallest work of love done to the least of his followers for his sake as done to himself.

This pecuniary charity is not to be limited to our particular connections—must not be confined to unfounded attachments, to party-favorites. It must be governed by the law of justice. We must not do a little good to one which may involve a greater injury to another: yet though we should keep our hearts always open, and our feelings alive to the

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general benefit, still, as our power must be inevitably contracted, whatever right others may have to our beneficence, local circumstances, natural expectations, and pressing necessity, confer the more immediate claim. The *most* immediate is that of "the household of faith."

From hence it appears, that in inquiring into the duties of charity, we must not overlook the use to be made of riches, one of the talents implied in the parable. The application of money, whether "kept by its owners to their hurt," or squandered to their destruction, will equally be made the subject of final investigation. Lord Bacon's remark, that "riches, when kept in a heap, are corrupt like a dunghill, but, when spread abroad, diffuse beauty and fertility," has been more admired than acted upon. All the fine sentences that have been pelted at the head of covetousness have probably never reformed one miser; nor have the most pointed aphorisms, not divinely directed, ever taught the luxurious the true use of money. Happily the age in which we live is so generally disposed to acts of beneficence, that there never was a period which less imposed the necessity to press the duty, to enforce the practice, or to point out the objects. A thousand new channels are opened, yet the old ones are not dried up; the streams flow in abundance, as if fed by a perennial fountain.

Let not any one, however, intrench himself in the supposed security of surrounding goodness. Let not any take comfort that he lives in an age of charity, if he himself is not charitable. We are not benevolent by contact or infection, or by breathing an atmosphere of charity. Yet who has not heard persons exultingly boast of this noble characteristic of the age, who are by no means remarkable for contributing their own contingent towards establishing its character? Probably many a man gloried in the valor of his country, and exulted in the pride of being an Englishman, after the battles of Trafalgar and Salamanca, who, had he been sent into the action, would have been shot for cowardice.

Who has not seen the ready eye discharge its kindly showers at a tale of woe, and the frugal sentimentalist comfort himself that his tears had paid more cheaply the debt of benevolence, for which his purse had been solicited. The author, many years ago, made one in a party of friends: an expected guest, who was rather late, at length came in; she was in great agitation, having been detained on the road by a dreadful fire in the neighborhood. The poor family, who had gone to bed, had been with difficulty awakened. The

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mother had escaped by throwing herself from a two pair of stairs window into the street. She then recollected, that, in her extreme terror, she had left her child behind in bed. To the astonishment of all present, she instantly rushed back through the flames, and, to the general joy, soon appeared with the child alive in her arms. While she was expressing her gratitude, the light of the lamps fell on its face, and she perceived, to her inexpressible horror, that she had saved the child of another woman; her own had perished. It may be imagined what were the feelings of the company. A subscription was instantly begun. Almost every one had liberally contributed, when a nobleman, who could have bought the whole party, turning to the writer of these pages, said, "Madam, I will give you—" every expecting eye was turned to the peer, knowing him to be unused to the giving mood; the person addressed joyfully held out her hand, but drew it back on his coolly saying, "I will give you this affecting incident for the subject of your next tragedy." Some will read this passage who were present on the occasion.

But since neither the logic nor the rhetoric of the writer, were she so happy as to possess either, is likely to make the "churl liberal," or to stir up the vain or the voluptuous to a beneficence which shall bear any fair proportion to the costly maintenance of their luxury or their vanity, the slight observations which follow shall be addressed to the bountiful giver; a character, blessed be God, as common as it is amiable. To the act it is unnecessary to excite him; to the motive he cannot too carefully look. This is the more requisite, as, in an age in which more excellent charity sermons are annually preached than ever were delivered since the establishment of Christianity—that which alone, of all the religions in the world, ever made charitable foundations a part of its institution—we now and then meet with one, which seems to invert the principle, and to put the point for the base. It is with diffidence we put the question, dreading to be suspected of indulging a spirit of censure, where we would wish to offer unqualified commendation; but do we not now and then hear assigned to almsgiving, nay, assigned to the individual contribution for which the well-intentioned preacher is eloquently pleading, a merit so vast, that it would seem to supply the absence of all other merits; a merit which would almost induce one to believe that a more than ordinary contribution to the plate would prove a golden key, to stand in *his* stead, who "has opened the kingdom of heaven to all believers?"

To explain my meaning by an example:—In the temple

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of *Him*, who gave his Son to die, to atone for the sins of the world, I once heard, and from no mean authority, charity called *the atoning virtue of the age.* To have termed it the prevailing, the distinguishing, the most amiable characteristic of the age, had been right and true. But when I found it thus gravely proposed as an expiation for sin, I was ready to imagine that I heard the exclamation of St. Paul to his Galatians—"I marvel that ye are so soon removed from him that called you unto the grace of Christ unto another gospel."

We most readily not only allow for, but admire, the ardor of an animated preacher, who, feeling his heart expand with his subject, finds it as much his delight as his duty to impart to every bosom the tender and compassionate sympathies with which his own overflows; and it is with reluctance we have presumed to intimate the restraints, which Christian piety should impose on itself in not overstating even a Christian duty.

We have no right to determine on the proportions and possibilities of any man's charity, but on the principle we may determine; there must be an exhaustless spring in the heart, even where the Christian's means will not admit of a perpetual current. Love is in fact that motive principle, without which neither faith, nor mysteries, nor martyrdom, no, nor even the addition of the second guinea to the plate, where only one had been intended, nor giving all our goods to feed the poor, will profit any thing. Where this vital spirit is wanting, the most ample bounty will not reach its end; where it exists, "the cup of cold water" shall be accepted. Without this animating principle, though the bounty may obtain applause, may influence others, may do good, and promote good, yet it may unhappily fall short of promoting the spiritual interests of the giver. He who has promised to render to every man according to his deeds, knows the principle of the deed, and has never promised to recompense any which has no reference to himself.

To neglect works of charity, not to be largely liberal in the performance of them according to our ability, is an infallible evidence that our professions of piety mean nothing. On the other hand, to depend upon them as what is to bear us out in our claims for heaven, before the tribunal of God, is to offend our Maker and deceive our own souls. We would be the very last to undervalue, or to discourage charity; but is it discouraging it to place it on its true ground; to assert that we may build an hospital without charity, as we may

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endow a church without piety, if we consider the one as an expiation for sin, or the other as a substitution for holiness?

Some are ingenious in contriving, by a strange self-delusion, to swell the amount of their charity, by tacking to it extraneous items of a totally distinct character. The author was formerly acquainted with a lady of rank, who, though her benevolence was suspected to bear no proportion to the splendor of her establishment, was yet rather too apt to make her bounties a subject of conversation. After enumerating the various instances of her beneficence, she often concluded by saying, "notwithstanding my large family I give all this in charity, *besides paying the poor rates;*" thus converting a compulsory act, to which all are equally subject, into a voluntary bounty.

Our corruptions are so liable to infect even our "holy things," that we should be vigilant in this best exercise of the best affections of the heart—affections which God, when he graciously converted a duty into a delight, gave us, in order, by a pleasurable feeling, to stir us up to compassion. We should be careful that the great enemy may not be plotting our injury, even when we are performing actions the most hostile to his interests.

As there is not a more lovely virtue in the whole Christian code, so there is not one which more imperatively demands our attention to the spirit with which we exercise it, and the temper with which we bear the disappointment sometimes attending our best designed bounties. Though charity is too frequently thrown away on those who receive it, it is never lost on the benefactor, if "he who gives, does it with simplicity." When the bountiful giver cannot find pleasure, he may always extract good. He may reap no small advantage himself from that liberality which has failed to confer any. He may gain benefit from the disappointment he experiences in the unworthiness of the object. When the project he had anxiously formed for doing good to another is defeated by perverseness, or requited by ingratitude, it not only does not check the spring of bounty in the real Christian, but it calls new virtues into action. The exercise of patience, an improvement in forbearance and forgiveness, a stronger conviction that we must not make the worthiness of the object the sole measure of our bounty, are well worth the money we have spent on the undeserving. Perhaps too the reiterated instances how little good the best man is able to do in this world, may serve to wean him from it, and be an additional inducement for looking forward to a better.

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But it is much easier to relieve our neighbor's wants, than to bear with his errors; the one gratifies our natural feelings, while the other offends them; the most difficult as well as the most sublime branch of charity, therefore, is the forgiveness of injuries, is the love of our enemies. It is a love humbly aiming to resemble his, who sends his rain on the just and on the unjust; a love not inspired by partiality, not extorted by merit. It is following the example, while we obey the precept of Christ, when we "do good to them that hate us." It is a charity which bursts with a generous disdain the narrow bounds of attachment and even of desert, levels every fence which selfish prudence would erect between itself and its enemies; it is a love, with respect to the objects, though with a boundless disproportion as to the measure, resembling God's love to us; it aims to be universal in kind, though it is low in the degree.

A very able divine* has insisted that it is to this part of the character of the Almighty that our Savior limits the injunction, "Be ye perfect as your Father which is in heaven is perfect." It is, indeed, one of the principal instances in which finite creatures can by imitation approximate to the character of God; most of his attributes rather requiring us to adore, than leaving it possible for us to imitate them. For though all the attributes of God afford the most exalted idea of complete perfection, yet the injunction to attain his image is strikingly applied in the New Testament to this particular part of the divine character. The apostle applies our being "followers of God, as dear children," afterwards to this individual instance, "forgiving one another, even as God for Christ's sake has forgiven you," adding, "and walk in love as Christ also loved us." "So that," says the bishop, "his exhortation to follow God stands inclosed on both sides with the precepts of love and charity, as if he intended to secure it from being applied to any thing else." St. Luke, who gives us an abridgment of the same sermon on the mount from which the passage is taken, also suggests the practice of love and forgiveness from the example of the Almighty, "who is kind to the unthankful and the evil." After having delivered the same beatitude, he corroborates the interpretation with an injunction, by saying, not be *perfect*, but "be merciful, as your Father also is merciful."

Our Savior impressed a solemn emphasis on the command to forgive the offences of others, when he implicated it with God's forgiveness of us. It is to be feared, that many who

* See bishop Sherlock's sermon on the text, "Be ye perfect," &c. &c.

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would think it an act of disobedience to omit the daily repetition of the divine prayer, of which this request forms so striking a clause, do not lay to heart the daily duty of supplicating for that frame of spirit which the petition involves. Can there be a more awful consideration, than that we put the grand request on which our eternal happiness depends on this issue, when we inseparably associate our own hope of pardon with the required and reasonable condition of pardoning others? Should we not be conscientiously cautious how we put up this petition, when we reflect, that we offer it to the great Searcher of hearts, who, while he listens to the request, can exactly determine on the integrity which accompanies it? The divine Author of the prayer seems to hold out a sort of test of the spirit of our obedience, when he proposes this difficult duty, as a trial of our general conformity to his commands. It seems selected by Infinite Wisdom as a kind of pledge of our submission to his will in all other points; our interest is confederate with our duty in the practice of this high and peculiarly Christian grace. The requisition suggests at once the most absolute obligation, and the most powerful motive.

This forgiveness seems not only to be one of the grand distinctions between the religion of the heathen and the Christian world, but to form a considerable difference between the duties inculcated in the Old and New Testament. In the former, indeed, there were not only indications and suggestions of this rule, but some exemplifications of its actual performance. It is remarkable, that when David, whose energy of character, or rather mysterious inspiration as a prophet, led him to be so vehement in his denunciations of vengeance on persons of professed enmity against God, and against himself as the anointed of God, yet exhibited eminent instances of placability in his conduct towards his own personal enemies, especially in the case of Saul. But, perhaps, the duty, after all, was not so fully made out, so clearly defined, so positively enjoined, nor was the frame of mind so evidently seen in "them of old time." We have many instances under that dispensation of saints and prophets laying down their lives for their religion, but it was reserved for the first New Testament martyr, when expiring under a shower of stones from his enemies, to say, "Lord, lay not this sin to their charge." The reason is obvious. It being expected, that our notions and practices should be adapted to the revelation under which we live, this sublime species of charity should necessarily rise in proportion to the clearness and dig-

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nity of that dispensation. It is congruous, therefore, that our forgiveness of injuries should be exercised in far higher perfection under this gospel, the professed object of which was to make a full and perfect revelation of the pardon of sin by the blood of a Redeemer. And we can only be said to have a conformity to his image, in proportion as we practise this grace. Let us, however, remember, to borrow the thought of an eminent divine, "that our forgiving others will not alone procure forgiveness for ourselves, while our not forgiving others is a plain proof that we ourselves are not forgiven."

CHAP. X.

On Prejudice.

THERE is not a more curious subject of speculation, than to observe the variety of colors with which opinion tinges truth; the bias which prejudice lends to facts, when it cannot deny them; the perversion it gives to the motive, when it cannot invalidate the circumstance; the warp and twist it gives to actions, which it dares not openly condemn; the disingenuousness into which it slides, even though it does not intend to maintain a falsehood; the bright rays with which it gilds, perhaps unconsciously, its own side of a question; the dark cloud by which it casts that of an adversary into shade.

Prejudice, if not altogether invincible, is, perhaps, the most difficult of all errors to be eradicated from the human mind. By disguising itself under the respectable name of firmness, it is of infinitely slower extirpation than actual vice. For vice, though persisted in through the perverseness of the will, never sets itself up for virtue; a vicious man knows what is right, though his appetites deter him from following it; but a prejudice, being perhaps more frequently a fault of the judgment than of the heart, is sometimes persisted in upon principle. No man will defend a sin as such, but even good men defend a prejudice, though every one else sees that it is producing all the effects of a sin, promoting hatred, souring the temper, and exciting evil passions.

Yet, though it may incidentally be attached to a good man, there are few errors more calculated to estrange the heart from vital religion, because there are none under which men

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rest so satisfied. Under the practice of any immorality they are uneasy, and that uneasiness may lead to a cure; for the light of natural conscience is sufficiently strong to show, that sin and peace cannot dwell together. But prejudice effectually keeps a man from inquiring after truth, because he conceives that he is in full possession of it, and that he is following it up in the very error which keeps him so wide of it. Or if, with the Roman governor, he ask, "what *is* truth?" like him, he turns away for fear of an answer. The strongest light cannot penetrate eyes that are closed against it; while to the humble, who desire illumination, God gives not only the object, but the faculty of discerning it.

As it is mental, rather than moral prejudice, which is the present subject of consideration, we shall say little of those prejudices of which the passions and appetites are the cause. Interest and sensuality see the objects which absorb them through their own dense medium, while the vision of either is probably clear enough in judging of the objects of the other's passion; the blindness being partial, and confined, like the lunacy of some disordered patients, to the single object to which the disease has a reference. Even probity itself is not of sufficient force to guide our conduct; we see men of sound integrity and of good judgment on subjects where prejudice does not intervene, acting, where it does, below the standard of ordinary men, governed by a name, carried away by a sound. It makes lovers of truth unjust, and converts wisdom into fatuity. It must, therefore, be an enlightened probity, or we may be injuring our fellow-creatures, when we persuade ourselves we are doing God service. Paul does not appear to have been a profligate, but to have been correct, zealous, and moral, and to have earned a high reputation among his own narrow and prejudiced sect. His error was in his judgment. The error of Peter was in his affections. A sudden touch of self-love in this vacillating, but warm-hearted disciple, made him dread to share in his Master's disgrace. But in this case, a single penetrating glance melted his very soul, brought him back to contrition, repentance, and love. To cure the prejudices of Paul, a miracle was necessary.

While the powerful arguments of our Lord put even the Sadducees, the infidels of the day, "to silence," they produced no such effect on the professing Pharisees; instead of rejoicing to hear their great doctrine of the resurrection so fully vindicated, they redoubled their prejudices against him, at the very moment in which he had obtained such a triumph

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in their cause. The first thing they endeavored was, to seek to entangle, by their casuistry, him who had just defeated the common enemy.

But, let us judge even the prejudiced without prejudice. Prejudice, to a certain degree, is not so much the fault of the individual, as of our common nature. And that sober tincture of it, which is inseparable from habits and attachments, is a fair and honest prepossession: for instance, whoever reprobated, as a censurable prejudice, that generous feeling,

For which our Country is a name so dear?

But, after all, prejudice, of some kind or other, is a natural inborn error, attached to that blindness which is an incurable part of our constitution.

Disagreement of opinion, therefore, if it be an evil inseparable from our present state of being, ought not to excite antipathy; complete unanimity of heart and sentiment being reserved as part of the happiness of that more perfect state, where the effulgence of truth will dissipate all the error and misapprehension which cloud our judgment here.

People commonly intend to judge fairly; and, when they fail, it is as often an error of the understanding as of the heart. They form their opinion of some particular subject from what they see of it. But though they see only a part, they frequently form their opinion of that which remains unseen more peremptorily than those who see the whole; for a large and clear view, by affording a justness of conception, commonly induces humility. Perhaps on their ignorance of those very parts of a question which they do not see, they form their decision on the whole; while the unseen points are precisely those which only could enable them to determine fairly on the general proposition.

We should not, however, very severely censure any for the mere opinion they form, this being a matter of the judgment rather than of the will; the true object of censure is their conduct under this false impression; in acting as hostilely as if their opinion was founded on the best ascertained facts. If we are all more or less prejudiced, it does not follow, that the conscientious act upon the feelings which the prejudice has excited. The harsh and the intolerant, indeed, let loose upon their adversaries all the bad passions which this disposition to prejudge opinions has stirred up; while the mild spirit in which Christianity governs, will conduct itself with the same general kindness as if no diversity of opinion subsisted. Though all prepossession arises from

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some cloudiness in the mind, it is a fair trial of the Christian temper, when the man who suffers by it continues to exercise the same tolerant and indulgent spirit towards the prejudiced party, as if there were a mutual concurrence of sentiment. If he have no other ground of objection to the person from whom he differs, there is something of a large and liberal spirit in acting with him, and speaking of him, on other occasions, as if the matter in debate did not exist.

How endless and intricate are the misleadings of political prejudice! It is as detailed and minute in its operations, as it is broad and extensive in its compass. Will not the circumstance of voting on the same side often stand instead of the best qualities, in recommending one man to the good opinion of another? With this unfounded partiality is naturally connected a dislike to better men, on the mere ground of their taking the opposite side; for party, which takes such a large permission to think and act for itself, takes care never to allow to others the liberty which it so broadly and uniformly assumes.

He who drinks deep into the spirit of party, minutely pencils all the shades of misrepresentation; his prejudice blackening, his partiality whitening; the one deforming what is fair, the other beautifying what is foul; the one defacing temples, the other garnishing sepulchres: providence, in the mean time, working its own way by these perverse instruments; the worst designers being sometimes surprised into doing more good than they intended, by a wish to anticipate the good projected by the opposite party, and so to throw an odium upon them, for not having been able to effect the same, though they had perhaps planned it, and though adverse circumstances alone had interrupted the scheme, or the want of a suitable occasion had delayed its accomplishment. Thus good is effected, the public is benefited, all are pleased. The conscientious rejoice that it is done at any rate; the prejudiced, that their party have the credit of doing it.

There are among the exhaustless manœuvres of a party champion, if I may so speak, gestures and signs of disapprobation, which are of equal efficacy with language itself. There are also artifices in writing, that resemble intonation and accent in a skilful speaker, which, by a turn of the voice, or a clause in a parenthesis, throw in a shade of distinction, lend an emphasis which makes mystery intelligible, and helps out the apprehension of the reader. There is such a thing as an intellectual shrug of the shoulders, a mental shake of the

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head, an implication that has more meaning than an assertion, a hint which can effectually detract from the commendation which prudence has extorted, and which serves to awaken suspicion more than a direct charge. Whatever is omitted, is sure to be more than supplied; whatever is dexterously left open by the writer, never fails to be overcharged by the reader, who always values himself on his ingenuity in filling up an hiatus. There is a way of setting out with general praise, in order to make the meditated charge more effectual. A practised reader will see through the artful circumlocutory preface, which is gradually preparing to introduce the little, though effectually disparaging particle *but*. These artifices raise up the ghost of some unknown evil in the character to be injured, and excite, at the same time, the idea of prudence and moderation in the censurer. It is a mysterious giving out, an assumed regret at being compelled to speak, a hypocritical conscientiousness, a reluctance of communication which, after it has told much more than all it knows, tenderly affects to have kept back the worst.

One evil which commonly arises from the perusal of a work of systematic opposition, whether the object be public or private, is, that it has a tendency to bias the more liberal reader, who took it up in the most impartial state of mind, with as undue a prejudice in favor of the party attacked, as the assailant labored to establish in favor of his own; so that, if any injustice be excited, it is on the contrary side to that which the author intended. Generally speaking, however, people do not sit down with a pure design to read impartially any thing, which, from the title of the work, or the name of the author, they foresee or suspect is likely to contradict their creed, whether previously adopted from conviction or prepossession.

But, to confine our observations to the prejudices which embitter common life: when we fancy we have been injured by some unfounded evil report, let us avoid considering the character of the reporter, or our own supposed injury, under the immediate impression of the intelligence, but try to divert our thoughts to some other subject, till our heated spirits have time to cool. We shall otherwise, too probably, feel and utter many things which exceed the bounds of strict justice. When the resentment has, in some measure, subsided, let us endeavor to collect and to retain only the simple and exact truth; what the enemy really said, and not what we suspected he might say. Let us retrench all that is imaginary, all that is merely suspicion; let us cut off all the aggravations

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of conjecture, all the inventions of passion, all the additions of revenge, all that belongs to unsubstantiated report; when these due retrenchments are made, we shall often see that the injury is not so great. It is no wonder if the object we saw through a mist was enlarged; a clear medium reduces it to its natural size.

But, supposing the worst to be true; religion, operating on observation, will at length teach us to set these metaphysical evils, these afflictions of the imagination, this anguish of wounded pride or irritated self-love, over against the real, deep, substantial miseries of body and mind, under which thousands of our fellow-creatures, nay, many of our friends, are at the moment sinking; and we shall blush at our own irritability; we shall bless God for the lightness of our own lot; we shall even be thankful for that evil which exists only in the opinion, or the report of a fallible creature, and which makes no part of our real self.

But, above all, let us never revenge the injury by opposing *our* injustice to that by which we suffer, by acting against our opponents with the same spirit with which we accuse them of acting against us. Retaliation, which is the justice of a vulgar mind, is of the very essence of an unchristian spirit. Where this is indulged, all the virtues of the adversary are rooted out by our resentment, and it is well if we do not plant vices in their room. Or if we do not invent faults for them, are we not too much disposed to take comfort in those they have; to cherish unkind reports of them, to give them a welcome hearing and a wide circulation? Nay, self-estimation and rooted prejudice may lead us entirely to mistake the character of him we call our enemy. A man is not necessarily wicked because he does not admire us. He may dislike some of our notions without hating our persons; or, after all, his prejudices may not be entirely ill-founded; and if we will examine ourselves on the ground of his charge in some particular instance, we may find that we have been wrong in a way which we might not have discovered without him. If his detection of our error lead us to correct it, we should not reckon that man among our worst enemies: or, if we should happen to be right, there is a great advantage in being assisted by the mode of attack, to know how to collect materials for our defence.

We must also learn sometimes to endure censure for things right in themselves, and, under existing circumstances, necessary, which yet may not appear right to others, because it may not be prudent to disclose those secret springs of action

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which, if revealed, would convince others that we have not acted wrong. Instead of spending our spirits in invective, or spoiling our temper by hatred; instead of liking our faults the better, or adhering to them the more, because pointed out by those we dislike; would it not be wiser to inquire, if our opinions may not be prejudices, as well as theirs? For it does not inevitably follow, that even the dislike of bad men is any certain proof of our goodness; though our natural propensity to think our own conduct and opinions right, disposes us to think them more right in proportion to the opposition which is made to either. We are blind to our own singularities, even though those singularities may be errors; and a spirit of resentment or resistance makes that blindness often more obstinate. On the other hand, may we not be too much disposed to think our censurers, whom we call wicked, more wicked than they are? or, though there may be errors in their conduct, this does not take from them the capacity of judging of ours. Even though their hearts are wrong, their judgment, as far as relates to others, may not be totally perverted. It is no infallible proof of their bad judgment, that they think meanly of ours.

But allowing that their judgment is as incorrect as their practice, and that their dislike proceeds from the "strong antipathy of bad to good," yet we may turn this dislike to profit. That hostility to religion, of which the Scripture so frequently speaks, is not intended to give the Christian a high notion of his own piety, but to encourage him against the fear and dejection which that hostility might create. If he meet with opposition, he must not fly for refuge to his own goodness, as contrasted with the faults of his opponents; nor must he be depressed, "as if some strange thing had happened to him;" much less must he convert the opposition he meets with into an evidence that he is in all instances right. In the consolations which the gospel holds out to the sufferer for righteousness' sake, it was intended to inspire him with courage, not vanity; with confidence in God, not in himself. He must not, therefore, so much value himself because he has enemies, as suspect that he may have enemies because he has deserved them. Or perhaps there is something wrong in us which we have not yet discovered, for which God permits us to have enemies. This suspicion may serve to render us circumspect, and quicken our endeavors to remove the ground of their censure. This, even if it do not reconcile them to us, will still make us gainers by their enmity; so that, in any case, the apostle's interrogation, "And who is he that shall

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harm you, if ye be followers of that which is good?" loses nothing of its force.

Who can forbear to lament, when he sees such a litigious spirit pervade superior minds, such airy nothings conjured into difficulties sufficient to clog the wheels of the noblest undertakings; an effect resulting merely from the partiality with which even wise men sometimes cleave to their own prepossessions, added to a reluctance to examine what may possibly be wrong on their own side, or right on the other?

It would be comparatively a small evil, if prejudices were only fostered on occasions in which religion has no concern. If we could hope to see such a general proficiency in true piety, that, where the sentiments of men concurred on all essential points, each side would sacrifice something on points that were indifferent, it would be a sort of realization of the communion of saints. But if it be called an act of Omnipotence to "make men of one mind in a *house*," what would it be to make them of one mind in a town or a kingdom? If we could witness a cordial agreement between those who profess to have the interests of the same religion at heart, such a concurrence in the wish to promote its great practical objects as would render them willing to concede their own theories, or their own judgment, in things that do not affect any of the vitals of religion, with such noble materials worked up into action, what a glorious world might this become! This combination of Christian feeling would extinguish all unkind debate, "all malice, and anger, and clamor, and evil-speaking." This peace-offering would oblige no one to renounce his principles; yet, by the extinction of petty differences, by such a confederacy of honest hearts and candid spirits uniting for some great public object, this wilderness would almost be converted into the garden of God. Nor would an inferior portion of the benefit be derived to the minds of those by whom, for a cause of general importance, the inconsiderable sacrifice was made; so far from it, it would be hard to say which made up the largest aggregate of good, the private exercise of individual virtue, or the promotion of the general end. But, alas! do we not sometimes see Christians more forward in attacking and exposing each other, than in buckling on their arms to make war on the common enemy? Are they not more ready to wage that war against a pious brother, who does not view some one opinion exactly in the same light with themselves, though equally zealous in the promotion of general truth, than against those who have no religion at all? What a church triumphant would ours be in one sense, though still

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militant in another, if there was a union of real Christians joining in one firm band to assail the strong-holds of vice and immorality, instead of laying open each other's errors and mistakes, and thus exposing the great cause itself to the derision of the unbeliever.

We cannot dispute ourselves into heaven, but we may lose our way thither, while we are litigating unimportant topics—things which a man may not be much the better if he hold, and which, if he hold them unrighteously, he might be better if he held them not. The enemies of religion cannot injure it so much as its own divisions about itself.

He who is zealously running after a favorite opinion, is in danger, in order to establish his point, of losing his moderation by the way, and overstepping truth at the end: and, what is worse, of converting the sober defence of his own system into a hostile attack of that of another; for a hot disputant seldom wages defensive war. The point under discussion so heats his temper, as to make him lose sight of its relative importance. Every consideration gives way in support of that opinion which has now the predominance in his mind. And this opinion is not seldom contended for with an eagerness proportioned to its real want of solidity; since great and important objects are seen by their own light, and require not the false fire of pride or passion to blazon their worth. Often does the hot controvertist assert that to be of the very essence of religion, which is but a mere adjunct; and often he seems to wonder how men can bestow so much time and thought on any other topic, while his grand concern is under consideration.

It is because these rooted and unexamined prejudices involve human affairs in so much perplexity, that the rectification of our judgment is one of the most important objects of our concern. The opinion which others entertain of us, though it may hurt our fortune or our fame, yet it cannot injure our more essential interests. Their judgment of us can neither wound our conscience nor shake our integrity. The false judgment we form of *them* may do both, especially if we act upon the opinion we have formed, if we speak injuriously of those of whom we think unkindly; if, by following a blind prejudice or precipitate judgment, we decide upon their characters, without possessing those grounds for determining which we insist are indispensable in the opinion they form of us. Jealousy, resentment, envy, often darken our perceptions, and are secretly operating on our minds, while we persuade others, and too probably ourselves, that we are

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promoting the interests of truth and justice, in exposing the faults, or counteracting the schemes of another.

Controversies will be forever carried on, though converts are not made: for I do not remember, that of the ancient sects of philosophers, any went over to their opponents. Among the professors of the old school divinity, it does not appear that the disciples ever changed their master—that the advocates of the *angelical* doctor ever adopted the cause of the *irrefragable;** and it is evident that the followers of Jansenius and Loyala died with the same mutual hostility in which they had lived.

As truth, however, will be assaulted, it must be defended. Controversial discussions, therefore, are not only harmless, but useful, provided truth be the inspiring motive, and charity the medium of conducting them. Truth is frequently beaten out by conflicting blows, when it might have contracted rust and impurity by lying quiet, uninquired into and unassailed. We are in danger of growing negligent about a truth which is never attacked, or of surrounding it with our own fancies, and appending to it our own excrescences; while the assailant teaches even the friendly examiner to clear the principal of all foreign mixtures, and, by giving it more purity, to give it wider circulation.

But, as we before observed, a thorough partisan in religion, as well as in politics, seldom takes up a book of controversy with an unbiased mind. He has a pre-determination which seldom gives way to argument. He does not see, that the supporter of his own cause may be maintaining it in a wrong temper; that, while he is fighting for orthodoxy, he may be aiming his side blows at a personal antagonist, or giving the death's wound to charity. He does not perceive, that he may be injuring the interests of practical religion, while he is laboring to promote such as are doctrinal, that he may be inflaming the temper, while he is informing the understanding. Yet a controversy is sometimes so managed, that, though truth may be vindicated, the minds of plain Christians may be little informed. Such readers do not understand the logician's terms, which, though they may have the effect of silencing the opponent, do but little towards enlightening the mind or strengthening the faith. Controversies, therefore, in religion or politics often do little good, in comparison of the labor they cost, and the evil tempers they excite. They are seldom read by those to whom, if temperately conducted,

* Scotus, Aquinas, and the other school divines, were distinguished by these and similar epithets.

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they might be of the most service—the unprejudiced. The perusal is commonly confined to two classes, friends and enemies. Now the friends and enemies of a writer form but a small proportion of the world of readers. Of these, the one flies to the book to get his prepossessions strengthened, the other, to get his antipathies confirmed. The partisan was pre-determined that no argument should shake him, the adversary sat down with the same liberal resolution. Nay, the probability is, that he will declare his former opinion is more immovably settled by the very reasons the opposer has suggested, so that he feels he is furnished with fresh arms by the antagonist himself.

But though neutrality is not a state of mind to be desired, moderation is. Even these polemical Christians, if each would look calmly and kindly on the other, might discover in his opponent a striking likeness of his own features, if not an entire similarity of complexion; a likeness sufficient to prove that they are both of the same family, all children of one common Father, though they do not carry the exact resemblance in some minutenesses in which parity is not necessary to prove affinity. The general family-likeness should, however, operate as an inducement to treat each other with brotherly kindness, even if they were not assured, which they all profess to be, that the common Father will be the common Judge.

CHAP. XI.

Particular Prejudices.

It is no inconsiderable part of our duty in our necessary connections with that motley mass of characters of which mankind is composed, to conquer certain prejudices which are too apt to arise, especially in persons of fastidious temper and delicate taste, against those who, though essentially valuable in their general character, have something about them which is positively disagreeable; or who do not fall in with some of our ideas, or whose manners are not congenial to our feeling. To wait before we love our fellow-creatures till their character be perfect, is to wait till we meet in heaven; and not to serve them till the feeling be reciprocal, is to act on the religion of the publican, and not of the Christian. We should love people for what we see in them of the image

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of their Maker, though it be marred and disfigured. That piety which makes them amiable in his sight, should prevent their being disgusting in ours. If we consulted our principles more, and our taste less, it would cure us of this sharp inquest into their infirmities.

Yet, on the other hand, if religious but coarsely-mannered persons, however safe they may be as to their own state, could be aware how much injury their want of delicacy and prudence is doing to the minds of the polished and discriminating, who, though they may admire Christianity in the abstract, do not love it so cordially as to bear with the grossness of some of its professors; nor understand it so intimately, as to distinguish what is genuine from what is extrinsic—if they could conceive what mischief they do to religion, by the associations which they teach the refined to combine with it, so as to lead them inseparably to connect piety with vulgarity, they would endeavor to correct their own taste, from the virtuous fear of shocking that of others. They should remember, that many a thing is the cause of evil which yet is no excuse for it; that many a truth is brought into discredit by the disagreeableness which may be appended to it, and which, though utterly foreign, is made to belong to it.

In addition to the infirmities which, from the fault of nature, or the errors of education, are not perhaps so easily avoided, there are others which are purely voluntary. Certain religionists there are who torment themselves with a chimera till they become the victims of the prejudice of their own creation. There is a querulous strain of pious vanity, in which, with a most unamiable egotism, they delight to indulge. It is a sort of traditionary lamentation of evils, which, having once been the lot of Christianity in the most awful extreme, are assumed to be still, in no inconsiderable degree, attached to its followers. Surrounded with all the conveniences of life, and faring comfortably, if not sumptuously, every day, they yet complain of persecution, as if Christianity still subjected its followers to the sufferings of those primitive disciples, "of whom the world was not worthy." But let them compare the dreadful catalogue of torments enumerated by the apostle to the Hebrews—enumerated the more feelingly, as he had experienced in all their extremity the sufferings he describes;—let them compare these with their own petty trials, of which the worst they have ever felt or feared is that "of mockings;" "*cruel* mockings," perhaps, as to the temper of the reviler, but innoxious to the imaginary sufferer. The glorious profession of the saints of old brought on them

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bonds and imprisonments by order of the government. Ours is sanctioned by the ruling powers. "*They* were destitute, afflicted, tormented;" our distresses are seldom caused by our piety, but frequently by our want of it. *They* were denied the exercise of their religion, we are protected in ours. *They* were obliged to meet clandestinely at undue hours in incommodious places. With us, provision is made for public worship, and attendance on it encouraged and commanded.

Let none of us, then, proudly or peevishly complain, as if our abundant piety was either forbidden, discouraged, or underrated. Private prejudice and individual hatred are indeed sufficiently alive, but the blows they aim fall hurtless as the feebly-lifted lance of Priam. If, then, we allow ourselves to murmur at our own disadvantages, will it not look as if we inwardly lamented that we are so very good to so little purpose; as if we repined at not being rewarded by universal applause for the superabundance of our piety? May we not, by our complaints, lead the world to suspect that our goodness was practised as a bait for that applause, and that, having missed it, we feel as if we had labored in vain?

But, from the prejudices which one class of Christians are too ready to indulge against another, we turn to those of a different character; to the philosophical man of the world, who is prepossessed not so much against any particular class of Christians, as against Christianity itself. These unhappy prejudices are often laid in by an education in which no one thing has been neglected except religion. The intellect has been enlarged by the grandeur, and polished by the splendor, of pagan literature, which took early possession of the yet vacant mind, and still maintains its ascendency with that power and energy which naturally belong to first and, therefore, deep impressions. The subsequent character continues to feel the effect of the excessive admiration early excited by some favorite authors, by whom the more impetuous passions and generous vices are exalted into virtues, while the spurious virtues are elevated into perfections little short of divine, and the whole adorned with whatever can captivate the fancy and enchant the taste; with beautiful imagery, ingenious fiction, and noble poetry. Who, indeed, does not feel divided between admiration at their writings, and regret that the writers were not providentially favored with divine illumination? Their brightness, like that of ebony, is a fine polish on a dark substance.

Here the indignant man of letters, if any such should condescend to cast an eye on these pages, will exclaim, are

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scholars, then, necessarily irreligious? God forbid; far from me be such a vulgar insinuation—far from me such a preposterous charge; not only against a multitude of eminent lay-Christians, but against the whole of that large and venerable body, whose life and labors are dedicated to religion, all of whom are, or ought to be, learned.

But it is nevertheless true, reason on it as we may, that in the state of excitement above described, every youth of taste and spirit, who has not been early grounded in Christian principles, must necessarily afterwards first open the volume of inspiration, and find it destitute of all that false but dazzling lustre with which the page of ancient learning is decorated.

And what must considerably add to the prejudice which may reasonably be expected to be thus excited, is, that they find the great object of one religion has been to pull down all the trophies of false glory which the other had so successfully reared. The dignity of human nature, of which they have read and felt so much, is laid prostrate in the dust. Man is stripped of his usurped attributes, robbed of his independent grandeur. A new system, of what appear to him mean-spirited and sneaking virtues—charity, simplicity, devotion, forbearance, humility, self-denial, forgiveness of injuries—is set up in direct opposition to those more ostensible qualities which are so much more flattering to the natural human heart.

Those obstacles to religious progress are removed, when, in early instruction, the defective principles of the one school are not only pointed out and guarded against, but are even, as is frequently the case, converted into salutary lessons, by being placed in just contrast with the other, and are made at once to vindicate the scheme, and to exalt the principles of Christianity.

But he into whose character these principles have not been infused, is too likely to set up on the stock of his own underived powers. The cardinal vice of an irreligious reasoner will naturally be that pride which sets him on considering the gospel as a narrower of human understanding, a debaser of the soaring spirit of intellectual man, a fetter on the expatiating fancy, a clog on the aspiring mind. This opinion, which he rather adopts by hearsay or tradition than by studying the sacred volume, continues to keep him ignorant of its contents. He is satisfied with knowing Christianity only in the state in which it is presented to him in certain passages, torn from their proper position, disjoined with malignant ingenuity, and distorted by perverted comment from that connection which would have solved every difficulty and annihilated the tri-

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umphant cavil. Or if, under this influence, he takes a superficial glance at Christianity, he sees a religion which, though it prohibits no legitimate greatness, yet a religion whose object is not to make man, according to the estimation of this world, great. His secret prejudices, too, may be augmented by the revolting doctrine, that he is not able to do any thing right of himself. He is to do the work, and to give the glory to another. After having followed with rapture the conqueror of Carthage hanging up his victorious laurels in the capitol, he will feel indignant to be taught, that the Christian conqueror, instead of glorying in his triumphant crown, "casts it before the throne."

He had observed in pagan lore, abstract truth prepared for the philosophers, pageants, feasts, and ceremonies for the people. This distinction of rank and intellect flattered human pride. In Christianity he finds one rule, and that a plain rule; one faith, and that a humbling faith; one scheme of duties, irrespective of station or talents: while, in the other, the systems of the learned, and the superstitions of the vulgar, were as distinct as any two religions, and as inefficacious as none.

But, after all, it is not the idolatry exhibited in the Greek and Roman writers that perhaps can overthrow his faith, though their licentiousness may affect his morals. The hardest blow to his principles will be given by the modern champions of unbelief; by writers against whom the young are not on their guard, because, without Christianity, they slide in under the general title of Christians, disseminating contraband wares under false colors. The wound inflicted by the baptized infidel is more profound than that of the polytheist, whose absurdities render his aim comparatively innoxious. The preposterous systems of a false religion are harmless, compared with objections raised, misrepresentations sent forth, and sarcasms insinuated against the true one.

But if the enthusiastic votary of those systems go no farther than to establish philosophy as his standard, and taste as his guide, when he is brought to think—not that philosophy and taste are to be abandoned, for Christianity requires no such sacrifice, but that they are to be admired subordinately—the misfortune is, that the second half of life is sometimes spent in imperfectly counteracting the principles imbibed in the first half. It is not easy to get rid of the prepossession in favor of a morality untinctured with religion—of "that love of fame which the pure spirit doth raise," but which it is the office of the renewed spirit to lower—of the admiration ex-

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hausted on splendid, but vicious characters—of the idolatry cherished for unprincipled heroes—of the partiality felt for all the powerful rivals which genius has raised up to religion—of all the sins that poetry has canonized—all the sophistry that praise has sanctified—all the pernicious elegancies of the gay—all the hollow reasonings of the grave.

In this state of neutrality between religion and unbelief, happy is it for the faltering novice if he be not fatally offended, that Christianity admits people who are not elegant-minded, who are not intellectual, to the same present advantages, to the same future hope, with the profound thinker, and logical reasoner. And, even after the most successful struggles in this new science, it will still be found, and the discovery is humiliating, that the religious attainments of the unlearned are often more rapid, because less obstructed, than those of "the wise and the disputer of this world." It requires at least a smattering of wit and knowledge to be sceptical, while the plain Christian, who brings no ingenuity into his religion, is little liable to the doubts of the superficial caviller, who seeks to be "wise above what is written." For if the endowments of the unlearned are smaller, they are all carried to one point. They have no other pursuit to divide or divert their attention; they have fewer illusions of the imagination to repel; they bring no opposing system to the Christian scheme; they bring no prejudices against a revelation which holds out a promise of reversionary happiness to those who are destitute of present enjoyments; and Christianity will generally be more easily believed by those whose more immediate interest it is to think it true. They have no interfering projects to perplex them; no contradictory knowledge to unlearn; their uninfluenced minds are open to impressions, and good impressions are presented to them. They have less pride to subdue, and no prepossessions to extinguish. They have no compromise to make with Christianity, no images of deities, which the philosopher, like the emperor Tiberius, wishes to set up in the same temple with Christ; no adverse tenets which they wish to incorporate with his religion, no ambition to convert it into a better thing than he made it. We have seen how much philosophy early impeded the reception of pure Christianity in some of the wisest and most virtuous pagan converts. Origen and Tertullian did not receive the truth from heaven with the same simplicity as the fishermen of Galilee.

To prove that this is no flight of enthusiastic fancy, let us recollect with what an extraordinary elevation and expansion

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of soul the Author of our religion bore his divine testimony to this truth: "I thank thee, O Father, Lord of heaven and earth, because thou hast hid these things from the wise and prudent, and hast revealed them unto babes." He then, instead of accounting for it by natural means, resolves the mystery into the good pleasure of God—"*Even so, Father, for so it seemed good in thy sight.*"

Even the vulgarity which, as we have already observed, mixes with, and debases the religion of the man of inferior attainments; the incorrect idiom in which he expresses his feelings and sentiments; the coarse images and mean associations which eclipse the divine light, do not extinguish it; they rather, in some measure, prove its intrinsic brightness by its shining through so dense a medium. When the man of refinement sees, as he cannot but see, what amelioration Christianity confers on the character of the uneducated; how it improves his habits, raises his language; what a change it effects in his practice, what a degree of illumination it gives to his dark understanding, what consolation it conveys to his heart; how it lightens the burdens of his condition, and cheers the sorrows of his life—he will, if he be candid, acknowledge, that there must needs be a powerful efficacy in that religion which can do more for the ignorant and illiterate, than philosophy has ever done for the great and the learned. And is it not an unanswerable evidence of the truth of Christianity and the power of grace, when we see men far surpassing all others in every kind of knowledge, themselves so far surpassed in religious knowledge by persons absolutely destitute of all other.

But if these weak and humble disciples afford a convincing evidence of the truth of Christianity; if even these low recipients exhibit a striking exemplification of its excellence, yet we must confess they cannot exhibit an equally sublime idea of Christian perfection, they cannot adduce the same striking evidences in its vindication, they cannot adorn its doctrines with the same powerful arguments as highly educated Christians. Habituated to inquiry and reflection, these are capable of forming more just views of the character and attributes of God, more enlarged conceptions of his moral government. They have also the advantage of drawing on their secular funds to augment their spiritual riches. They are conversant with authors contemporary with the inspired writers. Acquaintance with ancient manners and oriental usages also gives great advantage to the lettered readers of Scripture, and, by enabling them to throw new light on passages which time

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had rendered obscure, adds fresh strength, and double confirmation, to a faith which was before "barred up with ribs of iron."*

Scripture also affords a larger range of contemplation to those enlightened minds who study human nature at the same time, or who have previously studied it; because it was upon his knowledge of the human character that the Savior of the world so strikingly accommodated his religion to the wants and the relief of that being for whose salvation it was intended.

The better educated, also, will better discern, because it demands a higher exercise of the rational powers, that passages of a similar sound have not seldom a dissimilar meaning; and that it is not the word, but the ideas, which constitute the resemblance. The want of this discernment has led many well-disposed, but ill-informed persons, into mistakes.

Again:—Many detached texts are meant as a brief statement of a general truth, and intended to lead the reader into such trains of reflection as shall "exercise unto godliness," instead of exhibiting a full delineation and giving the whole face and figure, every side and aspect of the subject. Scripture frequently proposes some important topic in a popular manner, without making out its full deductions, or its series of consequences. Now, for the fuller understanding these heads, and turning them to their due improvement, the advantage lies entirely on the side of the thinking and the reasoning reader. It must be confessed, however, that the humble, though illiterate Christian, is able to attain all the practical benefits of these suggestions. He compares Scripture with Scripture, he substitutes no opinions of his own for those he there meets with, he never attempts to improve upon Christianity, he never wishes to make the Bible a better thing than he finds it. By diligent application, and serious prayer, his understanding enlarges with his piety. Above all, he does the "will of God;" and, therefore, "knows of the doctrine that it is of God."

* The paltry cavil on the impossibility that the penitent woman could anoint the feet of Jesus as he sat at meat, could only mislead such readers as were unacquainted with the recumbent posture in which the ancients took their meals. The triumphant sneer at the paralytic, who was let down from the house-top through the tiling with his couch, could only shake the faith of those who are ignorant of the manner in which the houses of eastern countries were roofed. Whether infidel writers took advantage of the supposed ignorance of their readers, or whether their ridicule of these imputed absurdities of Scripture arose from their own ignorance, we will not determine. Instances might be multiplied without number of this ignorance, or of this disingenuousness.

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It must be confessed also, on the other hand, that the professed scholar, by converting Scripture-learning into theses of discussion, is in some danger of making his knowledge more critical than practical. The same reason which is meant to enlighten, may be employed to explain away his faith; and his learning which adorns, is capable also of being turned to discredit it.

We must, however, admit, that when our supposed man of high education becomes essentially pious, his piety will be of a higher strain. It is more pure, more perfect, more exempt from erroneous mixtures, more clear of debasing associations, more entirely free from disgusting cant and offensive phraseology; less likely to run into imprudence, error, and excess; less in danger of the gloominess of superstition on one hand, and the wildness of fanaticism on the other. Having the use of a better judgment in the choice, he is not in the same danger of being misled by ignorant instructers; he is not liable to be drawn away by a vanity so difficult to restrain in the uneducated religious man; a vanity so frequently excited when he sees his own superiority, in this great point, to his worse-informed neighbors. From this vanity, and this want of the restraint of that modesty imposed by superior education, the man of low condition often appears more religious than he is, because, being disposed to be proud of his piety, he is forward to talk of it: while the higher bred frequently appear less pious than they really are, from the good taste and delicacy which commonly accompany a cultivated mind. There is also another reason why they exhibit it less—they are aware that, in their own society, the exhibition would bring them no great credit.

If unlettered Christians labor under some disadvantages, we repeat it, they yet afford an internal evidence of the truth of Christianity, and an evidence of no small value. They show that it is the same principle which, when rightly received, pervades alike all hearts; a principle which makes its direct way to understandings impervious to the shafts of wit, and insensible to the deductions of reasoning—to minds sunk in low pursuits, indurated by vulgar habits. It is a striking proof of its being the same principle, that such seemingly disqualified persons possess as clear views of its nature, at least of its broad and saving truths, as the man of genius and the scholar; destitute as they are of all his advantages, wanting perhaps his natural perspicacity, unused to his habits of inquiry, incapable of that spirit of disquisition which he brings from his other subjects to the investigation of this.

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No one, if he examine impartially, can fail to be struck with this grand characteristic of the truth of Christianity—not only, that in all degrees of capacity and education in the same country, but that in different countries, in those where taste and learning are carried to the highest perfection, and in dark and ignorant nations, where not only the sun of science has never dawned, but where literature has never softened, nor philosophy enlarged the mind, where no glimpse of religion can be caught by a reflex light, as is the case in polished and Christian countries,—yet wherever Christianity has made its way, and pierced through the native obscurity, there the genuine spirit, and the great essential fruits of the gospel, will be found just the same; the same impression is made by the same principle; the same results spring from the same cause; and the disciples of Christ, whether it be the converted Greenlander or the academical believer, are recognised in all their distinguishing features, are identified in all the leading points. Such a concurrence in sentiment, feeling and practice, such a union in faith, hope and charity, amongst persons dissimilar in all other respects, unlike in all other qualities, unequal in all other requisites; minds never made to be akin by nature thus allied by grace, bearing the same stamp of resemblance in spirit as their possessors bear in the common properties of body: all this is a convincing proof that there must be something divine in a principle which can assimilate such contrarieties—which can reunite those in one common centre who differ in all other respects—which can annihilate all other distinctions to produce identity in the leading point. Does not all this prove it indeed to be the work of God, a work which requires not previous accomplishments or preparatory research, but only a willing mind, an unprejudiced spirit, and an humble heart? Does it not prove, that where the essence, and the power, and the spirit of Christianity really reside, it will produce the one grand effect, *a new heart and a new life*.

CHAP. XII.

Further Causes of Prejudice.

It is a singular fact that the infidel and the fanatic sometimes meet at the same point of error—that reason has little to do with religion. The enthusiast we are hopeless of con-

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vincing by argument, because he is commonly ignorant; but the lettered sceptic may be better taught even by his pagan masters. Plutarch, after a large discussion whether brutes had any reason, determines in the negative from this consideration, *because thay had no knowledge or feeling of a Deity.* The great Roman orator expresses the same idea when he asserts, *that a capacity for religion was the distinguishing mark of rationality, and that this capacity is the most unequivocal sign of reason.*

Yet sound reason and Christian piety are sometimes represented as if they were belligerent powers, and as if *orders in council* had been issued to cut off all commerce between them; as if they were better calculated eternally to meet sword in hand, than in the conciliatory way of treaty and negotiation; as if every victory of the one must necessarily be obtained at the expense of the other's defeat. But is it not an affront to the Giver of every good gift to represent his highest natural and his supernatural endowments as infallibly hostile to each other? It is evident that when reason and religion act in concert, they strengthen each other's hands. But when they injudiciously act in opposition, perverted reason starves the ardor of piety, or ill-judging piety hands over reason to obloquy and scorn. In every case, the ill-understood jealousy of each injures the interests of both.

The truth is, sound and sober Christianity is so far from discountenancing the use of reason, that she invites its co-operation, knowing that it possesses powerful arms to defend her cause; to defend her against the encroachments of error, the absurdities of fanaticism, the inroads of superstition, the assaults of infidelity. But while she treats it not as a rival but an ally, Christianity, strong in almighty strength, maintains her own imperial power unfringed. While she courts the friendship of her confederate, she allows not her own uncontrolled superiority to be usurped. She assigns to reason its specific office, and makes it know and keep its proper limits. The old law, indeed, being a formula of ceremonies, and a digest of ordinances for one particular people, left not so full an exercise for the use of reason. Descending to the most minute particulars, and being expanded into the most detailed directions, it left little for the disciple but to read the rule and follow it. But the New Testament being, as we have elsewhere observed, rather a system of principles, than a mere didactic table of small as well as great duties, leaves much more to the exercise of reason, and furnishes a much larger field for the understanding to develop, to compare, to sepa-

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rate, to combine. The whole plan of duty is, indeed, most clearly and distinctly laid open; but every uniting particle, every intermediate step, every concatenating link, is not traced out with amplitude and fullness.

The more instructed Christian will perceive that some expressions are merely figurative; some are directions for persons under one circumstance, and some for those under another. The gospel requires, indeed, as implicit submission from the Christian, as the law required from the Jew; but while it proposes truths, all of which equally demand his obedience, some of them require more especially the use of his reflection, and the exercise of his sagacity. We allude not to the great "mysteries of godliness," but to duties which are of individual application.

If we were to pursue prejudice through all its infinite variety, we should never have done with the inexhaustible subject. Observation presents to us followers of truth of a very different cast, though their uniform object be the same. These persons, while they sometimes seek her temple by different paths, are yet oftener kept wide of each other by words than by things. Whatever, indeed, be the separating principle, prejudice is always carried to its greatest height by the impatience of the too fiery on the one hand, and the contempt of the too frigid on the other. But both, as we observed, maintain their distance more by certain leading terms by which each is found to be discriminated, and by an intolerance in each to the terms adopted by the other, than by any radical distinction which might fairly keep them asunder. Now we do not wish them to relinquish the use of their peculiar terms, because these terms either do, or should designate to their minds the most important characters of religion. The Christian should neither shrink from his own strong-hold, nor treat with repulsive disdain him who appears earnest in his approaches towards it, though he has not as yet, through some prejudice of education, sought it in a direct way. There are many terms, such as *faith* and *grace*, and others which might be mentioned, which subject the more advanced Christian to the imputation of enthusiasm and the charge of cant. These, however, are words which are the signs of things on which his eternal hopes depend, and he uses them, even though he may sometimes do it unseasonably, yet not as the shibboleth of a profession, but because there are no others exactly equivalent to their respective meanings. In fact, if he did not use them when occasion calls, he would be deserting

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his colors, and be making a compromise, to the ruin of his conscience.

But let him not in return fall too heavily on what are, to his ear, the obnoxious terms of his adversary. Let him not be so forward to consider the terms *virtue* and *rectitude* as implying heresies that must be hewed down without mercy; as substantives which must never find a place in the Christian's vocabulary. They are not only very innocent but very excellent words, if he who utters them only means to express by virtue those good works which are the fruits of a right faith, and by rectitude that unbending principle of equity and justice which designates the confirmed Christian. The abuse of these terms may, indeed, make the more pious adversary a little afraid of using them, as the unnecessary multiplication of ordinary cases in which the more scriptural terms are pressed into the service, may make the less advanced Christian unreasonably shy of obtruding them.

But why must we vilify in others what we are cautious of using ourselves, in order to magnify what we choose to adopt? We should rather be glad that those who somewhat differ from us come so near as they do; that they are more religious than we expected; that if they are in error, they are not in hostility; or if seemingly averse, it is more to the too indiscriminate and light use of the opponent's terms, than to the sober reception of the truths they convey. Let us be glad, even at the worst, to see opposition mitigated, differences brought into a narrower compass. Let us not encounter as leaders of hostile armies, but try what can be done by negotiation, though never of course by concession in essentials. If the terms virtue and rectitude are used to the exclusion of faith and grace, or as substitutes for them, it may afford an opening for the pious advocate to show the difference between the principle and its consequence, the root and its produce. He should charitably remember that it is one thing for an honest inquirer to come short of truth, and another for a petulant caviller to wander wide of it. It is one thing to err through mistake or timidity, and another to offend through wilfulness and presumption. If the inquirer be of the former class, only deficient, and not malignant, he may be brought to feel his deficiency, and is often in a very improvable state. It would therefore be well to let him see that you think him *right* as far as he goes, but that he does not go the whole length. If he professes "to deny all ungodliness and worldly lusts," this is no small step: yet he may still require to be convinced that it is "by the grace of God teaching him."

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Here the two ideas expressed by your term of grace, and his of virtue, are brought into united action, with this difference, or, if you please, with this agreement, that your's being the cause, and his the effect, the Christian character attains its consummation between you. You must, however, endeavor to convince him, that though the greater includes the less, the reverse cannot be true; that faith and grace in the Christian sense involve virtue and rectitude, but virtue and rectitude in the philosophical sense desire to be excused from any connection with faith and grace. But the offence taken at terms creates hostility at the outset, blocks up the avenues to each other's heart, and leads men to be so filled with the things in which they differ, as to keep them in the dark as to the things in which they agree.

The more strict disputant will perhaps continue to insist that no such terms as virtue and rectitude are to be found in any evangelist. Granted. Neither do we find there some other solemn words expressive of the most awful verities of our religion. The holy *Trinity* and the *satisfaction* made by the death of Christ, are not, I believe, in any part of the New Testament expressed by these terms, which were first used some ages after in the Byzantine church. But can it be said that the things themselves are not to be found there? They are not only conspicuous in every part of the gospel, but make up the sum and substance of what it teaches.

While each disputant then contends for his own phrases, let not the one suspect that grace and faith are the watch-words of enthusiasm; nor the other conclude that infidelity skulks behind virtue, and pagan pride behind rectitude. St. Paul expressly exhorts his converts to "add to their faith virtue," and if the inverted injunction was never given, it was not because faith was unnecessary where virtue previously existed, but because virtue, Christian virtue, never could have existed at all without previous faith. In enjoining virtue, the apostle, upon his own uniform principle, supposes the Christian to be already in possession of faith; this he ever considers the essential substance, virtue the inseparable appendage. Thus the divine Preacher on the mount, in his prohibition of an hypocritical outside, does not say, give alms, fast, pray; he concluded that his followers were already in the practice of those duties, and on this conviction grounded his cautionary exhortation, *when* thou doest alms, *when* thou prayest, *when* thou fastest. He taught them to avoid all ostentation in duties, to which he alluded as already established. Be it observed—by the Savior himself no attribute is so con-

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stantly enjoined or commanded as faith. His previous question to those who resorted to him to be cured, was not, if they had *virtue*, but *faith;* but never let it be forgotten, that as soon as the cure was performed, the man of faith was enjoined, as the surest evidence of his virtue, *to sin no more.*

CHAP. XIII.

Humility the only true Greatness.

HUMILITY is one of those qualities of which Christianity requires the perpetual practical exercise. It does not insist that we should be constantly feeding or instructing others—that we should be every moment engaged in acts of benevolence to our fellow-creatures, or of mortification to ourselves; but, whether we teach or are taught, whether we communicate our good things to others, or are dependent on others for the communication to ourselves, humility is required as the invariable, the indispensable, the habitual grace, in the life of a Christian. Pride being the radical distemper of the natural man, the business, the duty, the blessedness of the spiritual man, is to be freed from it.

However valuable high intellectual attainments have been found in the vindication of religion, however beneficially talents and learning have been exerted in adducing the evidences and augmenting the illustrations of divine truth, yet for the most striking exemplification of genuine piety, "To this man will I look, saith the Lord, who is of an humble spirit." Christianity gives a new form to the virtues, by recasting them in this mould. Humility may be said to operate on the human character like the sculptor, who, in chiseling out the statue, accomplishes his object, not by laying on, but by paring off, not by making extraneous additions, but by retrenching superfluities; till every part of the redundant material is cleared away. The reduction which true religion effects, of swelling passions, irregular thoughts, and encumbering desires, produces at length on the human mind some assimilation to the divine image—that model by which it works, as the human resemblance is gradually, and at length successfully, wrought in the marble.

Christianity, though equally favorable to the loftiest as to the lowest condition of life, was not intended to make man great, but to make him contented to be little. Though no enemy

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to the possession and cultivation of the highest mental powers, but affording, on the contrary, the noblest objects for their investigation, and the richest materials for their exercise; yet she rests not her truth on their discussions, nor depends for making her way to the heart on their reasonings. While the cheering approbation of an humble faith is an encouragement repeatedly held out in the gospel, there is not one commendation of talent, except for its application; not the least notice of rank or riches, except to intimate their danger; not any mention of the wisdom of this world, except to pronounce its condemnation.

Humility stands at the head of the beatitudes, and is incorporated with them all. And the gracious injunction, "Learn of me, for I am meek and lowly in heart," is a plain intimation, that our Redeemer particularly intended that portion of his own divine character for the most immediate object, not of our admiration only, but of our imitation. It is the temper which of all others he most frequently commends, most uniformly enjoins, and which his own pure and holy life most invariably exhibits. If we look into the Old Testament, we see that God, after having described himself as "the high and holy One which inhabiteth eternity," by a transition the most unexpected, and a condescension the most inconceivable, immediately subjoins, that "He dwelleth with the contrite and the humble;" and this from a motive inexpressibly gracious, "to revive the spirit of the humble, and to revive the heart of the contrite."

Is it not incredible that, after these repeated declarations and examples of the almighty Father and of the eternal Son, pride should still be thought a mark of greatness, an ebullition of spirit; and that humility should be so little understood to be the true moral dignity of Christians? While in the religion which they profess there is no excellence to which it is not preliminary, and of which it is not the crown; nor are other virtues genuine but as they are accompanied with this grace, and performed in this spirit. No quality has acquired its perfection, till it is clarified and refined by being steeped in humility.

It is indeed essential to the very reception of Christianity, for, without this principle, we shall be disposed to cavil at divine revelation, to reject, at least, every truth revolting to human pride; we shall require other ground for the belief in God than his revealed word, other evidence of his veracity than the internal conviction of our spiritual wants, and the suitableness of that remedy which the gospel presents to us. This principle,

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therefore, is indispensable; without it, we shall be little inclined cordially to receive Christianity as a light, or to obey it as a rule. Without it we shall not discover the evil of our own hearts; and, without this discovery, we shall by no means value the grace of the Holy Spirit; we shall exercise no habitual dependence on the promised assistance, nor ask for a support of which we do not feel the want.

But humility, by leading us to form a just estimate of ourselves, teaches us to discern the narrowness of our capacities. It reminds us, that there are many things even in the works of God's natural creation far above our comprehension; that from the ignorance and blindness of our minds we make frequent mistakes, and form a very erroneous judgment about things comparatively obvious and intelligible. This temper will bring us to credit with fuller cordiality the testimony which God in his word gives of himself, and cure us of the vanity of rejecting it, on the mere ground that we cannot comprehend it. It will deliver us from the desire of being "wise above what is written," and is the sole antidote to the perils of that promise of unhallowed knowledge, with which the grand seducer tempted his first credulous victims.

It is not till humility has practically made known to us how slowly religion produces its effect on ourselves, that we cease to marvel at its feeble influence and slow-paced efficacy on those around us. As a consequence, this principle leads the humble Christian to be severe in judging himself, and disposes him to be candid in judging others. When he compares himself with worse men, it furnishes a motive, not for vanity, but gratitude; when with better, for additional self-abasement.

St. Paul seems to have been fully aware of the lagging movement which even Christians make towards the complete attainment of this heavenly temper. In his address to the Colossians, after having expressed his firm hope of their sincere conversion, in that they had "put on the new man, which is renewed in knowledge after the image of Him that created him," he yet finds it expedient to exhort them; and, for this very reason, "to put on," together with other Christian qualities which he enumerates, "humbleness of mind."

He might have pressed this duty under the supposition of two cases, and in either the injunction would be just. As they had made a public profession of Christianity, he intimates, that there was no surer way of evincing that their profession was sincere, and their conversion radical, than by this unequivocal mark, the cultivation of an humble spirit.

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Or, on the other hand, however deeply rooted they might be in faith and piety, he might feel it necessary to remind them, that they should not consider themselves as having attained a perfection which left no room for improvement. So far was this deep proficient in divine wisdom from thinking that all was done when the convert had entered on his new course, he enjoins them, even after this effectual change, that they should, as a consequence as well as a proof, *therefore*, "put on" this Christian grace; and produces their conversion as a motive, "*because* you are already renewed." He does not recommend any specific act, so much as a general disposition of "mind," implying, according to his uniform practice, that growth was necessary to life, and progress to perfection.

The doctrines of Christianity, and the discourses of its divine Author, are rather pointed against certain radical evil principles, than extended to their lesser ramifications. When the powerful artillery of the gospel was more especially levelled against the strong-holds of pride, it included in the attack all the minor offences resulting from it; implying, that if the citadel be conquered, the intimidated forces in the outworks will make but a feeble resistance.

Even the worldly and the careless, who are perhaps too inattentive to perceive that humility is the predominating feature in the truly religious character, as well as the most amiable and engaging part of it, yet pay it a sort of involuntary homage in adopting its outward appearance. Many among the more elegant classes of society, who cannot be brought to adopt the principle, assume the form, as the most unequivocal mark of their superior condition. But while the well-bred exhibit the polished exterior of humility in *manner*, they are called, as Christians, to cultivate the inward and spiritual grace. In spite of the laws against egotism which the code of good-breeding has issued, a nearer intimacy sometimes discloses the self-satisfaction which politeness had thinly veiled. While we are prone to carry our virtues in our memory, we cannot be always on our guard against producing them in our conversation. Such virtues, for the most part popular ones, caught our taste perhaps from the applause with which they were received, or the eloquence with which they were set forth in our presence; and as we acquired them in public, and by hearing and reading, we shall be contented to exercise them in profession and talk. Many, and very many, of these qualities may be grafted on the old stock, and look green and flourishing, whilst they "have no root in themselves;" but genuine humility springs out of a root

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deeply fixed in the soil of a renewed heart, and takes its first ground on the full conviction of our apostasy from God.

As we make a proficiency in this humbling knowledge of ourselves, our confidence in our own virtues proportionably diminishes. The delight we once received in the contemplation is first abated by self-distrust, and finally abolished by self-acquaintance. Then we begin to profit by the deep sense of our own weakness, and to send forth the genuine fruits of a strength and a virtue derived from higher sources. And thus, the sound conviction of our own frailty, though purchased at the expense of a great error, may prove, if we might venture to say it, of more real benefit to our own mind, than the performance of a splendid action, if of that action all the use we had made had been to repose added confidence in our own strength, or to entertain higher notions of our own goodness.

Yet, while we ought to be deeply humbled at every fresh detection of evil in our hearts, to be discouraged at the discovery from proceeding in our Christian course is so far from being an effect of humility, that it is rather the result of pride. The traveller who meets with a fall, does not recover his ground by lying still and lamenting, but by rising and pursuing his journey. Joined with this faulty despondency, or still more frequently preceding it, is to be traced the operation of a blind and morbid pride. Particularly, if the intimation of the fault we have committed comes from others, the heart is found to rise at the bare suggestion that we are not perfect. We had perhaps been guilty of a hundred faults before, of which, as others took no notice, they made little impression on ourselves. We commit a smaller error, which draws the eyes of the world upon us, and we are not only dejected but almost hopeless. The eye of God was equally witness to our preceding faults, yet, from their being secret, they produced little compunction, while that which is obvious to human inspection produces sorrow on the mere ground of producing shame. Perhaps we were permitted to fall into this more notorious error that we might be brought to advert to those of which we had been so little sensible; and though the depression consequent upon this fault is rather the consciousness of mortified pride than of pious contrition, yet God may make use of it to awaken us to a feeling of our general corruptions, to warn us not to depend on ourselves, and to put us on our guard against "secret faults," as well as against open and "presumptuous sins."

Even a good man is not entirely exempt from the danger

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of occasional elation of spirit; even a good man does not always judge himself so rigorously as he ought; yet, though he makes too many partial allowances, is too much disposed to softenings and abatements, to apologies and deductions, still he is, on the whole, suspicious of himself, distrustful of his own rectitude, on his guard against habitual aberrations from humility. Though tremblingly alive to kindness, his sincerity makes him almost ready to regret commendation, because his enlightened conscience tells him, that if the panegyrist knew him as he knows himself, it would have been bestowed with much abatement; and he is little elated with the praise which is produced by ignorance and mistake. Though he has fewer faults than some others, yet, as he must know more of himself than he can know of them, his humility will teach him to bear patiently even the censure he does not deserve, conscious how much he does deserve for faults which the censurer cannot know.

There is, however, no humility in an excessive depreciation of ourselves. We are not commanded to take a false estimate of our own character, though a low would be too frequently a just one. While the great apostle St. Peter was contented to call himself *the servant of Jesus Christ*, his self-constituted successors, by an hyperbole of self-abasement, have denominated themselves *servants of the servants of God*. And yet they have not, it is to be feared, *always* surpassed the disciple they profess to follow, in the display of this apostolic grace.

Nor is the appearance of this quality any infallible proof of its existence. Nothing is more common than to hear affability to the poor produced as an undoubted evidence of the humility of the affluent. The act, indeed, is always amiable, whatever be the motive; but still the expression is equivocal. Does it not sometimes too much resemble that septennial exhibition of humility which calls forth so much smiling condescension from the powerful, while it conveys "an hour's importance to the poor man's heart?" The one enjoys the brief, but keen delight, of reviling his superiors with impunity, with the better gratification of conferring favors instead of receiving them; the other, like Dryden's Achitophel, "bowing popularly low," wins, by his courtesy, that favor, which he would not perhaps have obtained by his merit. But the curtain soon closes on the personated scene: the next day, both fall back into their natural character and condition. The periodical condescension at once reinstates itself into seven years' dignity, while the *independent elector*

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cheerfully resumes his place in his *dependent* class, till the next Saturnalia again invite to the reciprocal exchange of character.

Where the difference of condition is obviously great, nothing is lost, and something may be gained by familiarity; the condescension is so apparent, that though it properly excites both admiration and gratitude in the indigent, it does not infallibly prove the lowliness of the superior. The impassable gulf which separates the two conditions, the immovable fences which establish that distance, preserve the poor from encroachment, and the rich from derogation: no swellings of heart arise against the acknowledged dependent, no dread of emulation against the avowed inferior. Even arrogance itself is gratified at seeing its train augmented by so amiable a thing as its own kindness. Notice is richly repaid by panegyric, and condescension finds it has only stooped to rise. If we give pleasure in order to be paid with praise, we had better be less liberal that we might be less exacting. The discreetly proud are aware, that arrogant manners bar up men's hearts against them; their very pride, therefore, preserves them from insolence; the determined object being to gain hearts, and their good sense telling them that a haughty demeanor is not the way to gain them, they know how to make the exterior affable in proportion as the mind is high; for the ingenuity of pride has taught it that popularity is only to be obtained by concealing the most offensive part of itself. Thus it can retain its nature and gratify its spirit, without the arrogant display by which vulgar pride disgusts, and, by disgusting, loses its aim.

The true test is, how the same person feels, and how he conducts himself, towards him whose claims come in competition with his own—who treads on his heels in his pretensions, or surpasses him in his success—who is held up as his rival in genius, in reputation, in fortune, in display—who runs the race with him and outstrips him. More severe will be the test, when the competitor is "his own familiar friend," who was his equal, perhaps his inferior, in the contest for academical honors, but is now a more fortunate candidate for the prizes which the world distributes, or his decided conqueror on the professional arena.

His humility is put to the trial, when he hears another extolled for the very quality on which he most values himself—commended for something in which he would, if he dared, monopolize commendation; it is tried when he sees that a man of merit has prospered in an enterprise in which *he* has

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failed, or when he is called upon for the magnanimity to acknowledge one who, though below him in general character, is still his superior in this particular respect; it is, when, in some individual instance, this competitor has promoted the public good by a means which he had declared to be totally inapplicable to the end.

The true Christian will be humble in proportion to the splendor of his endowments. Humility does not require him to stupefy or disavow his understanding, and thus disqualify or indispose him for great active duties. If he possesses talents, he is not unconscious of them, but, instead of exulting in the possession, he is abased that he has not turned them to better account, he is habitually thinking how he can most essentially serve God with his own gift. Sensible that he owes every thing to his divine Benefactor, he feels that he has not made him the return to which he was bound, and that his gratitude bears little proportion to his mercies; so that the very review of his abilities and possessions, which inflates the hearts of others, only deepens his humility, only fills his mind with a fuller sense of his own defect of love and thankfulness. Every distinction, instead of intoxicating him, only augments his sense of dependence, magnifies his weight of obligation, increases his feeling of accountableness. His humility has a double excitement:—he receives every blessing as the gift of God through the merits of his Son; it is increased by the reflection, that such is his unworthiness he dares not even supplicate the mercy of his Creator but through the intercession of a Mediator: "where is boasting then? it is excluded." Not only on account of any good he may have, but also on account of evils from which he has been preserved, he acknowledges himself indebted to divine assistance; so that his escapes and deliverances, as well as his virtues and successes, are subjects of gratitude rather than of self-exultation.

It will not be departing from the present object, if we contrast the quality under consideration with its opposite. While humility is never at variance with itself, pride is a very inconsistent principle. It knows not only how to assume the garb of the attribute to which it is opposed, but even descends to be abject, which humility never is. Consider it on one side, nothing is so self-supported; survey it on the other, you will perceive that nothing is so dependent, so full of claims, so exacting, so incapable of subsisting on itself. It is made up of extrinsic appendages; it leads a life of mendicity; it stoops to beg the alms of other men's good opinion for its

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daily bread. It is true, the happiness of a proud man, if he have rank, arises from an idea of his own importance; but still, to feed and maintain this greedy self-importance, he must look around him. His pleasures are derived, not so much from his personal enjoyments, as from his superiority to others; not so much from what he possesses, as from the respect his possessions inspire. As he cannot entirely support his feelings of greatness by what he finds in himself, he supplies the deficiency by looking backward to his ancestors, and downward upon his train. With all his self-consequence, he is reduced to borrow his dignity from the merits of the one, and the numbers of the other. By thus multiplying himself, he feels not only individually, but numerically, great. These foreign aids and adjuncts help him to enlarge the space he fills in his own imagination, and he is meanly contented to be admired for what is, in effect, no part of himself. This sentiment is, however, by no means limited to rank or riches.

If the penury of pride drives it to seek its aliment in the praise of others, it is chiefly because we want their good opinion to confirm us in that which we have of ourselves. When we secretly indulge in reckoning up the testimonies we have collected to our worth, it is because we like to bring as many witnesses as we can muster, that we may have their approving verdict in additional proof that our own judgment was right. In fact, we think better of ourselves in proportion as we contrive to make more people think well of us. But, however large the circle which "high imaginations" draw round the individual self in the centre, we can really occupy no more than our allotted space; we may indeed change our position, but, in shifting it, we fill no more than we filled already, for by the removal we lose as much as we gain.

It is an humbling truth, that the most powerful talents are not seldom accompanied with vehement passions, that a brilliant imagination is too frequently associated with ungoverned appetites. Neither human reason, nor motives merely moral, are commonly found to keep these impetuous usurpers in order; the strength of men's passions tempting them to violate the rules which the strength of their judgment has laid down. Nature cannot operate without its own sphere. What is natural in the intellect, will not, of itself, govern what is natural in the appetite. If the lower part of our nature is subdued, it is not without the Holy Spirit assisting the higher. Wit, especially, has such a tendency to lead astray the mind which it embellishes, that it is a striking evi

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dence of the efficacy of grace, when men, whose shining talents make virtue lovely in the eyes of others, reject themselves "high thoughts engendering pride;" when they, on whose lips the attention of others hangs with delight, can, themselves, by this divinely infused principle, "bring every thought into captivity to the obedience of Christ."

There is no quality so ready to suspect, and so prompt to accuse, as that which we are considering; there is no fault which a proud man so readily charges upon others as pride: especially if the person accused possess those distinctions and accomplishments, the possession of which would make the accuser proud. Men full of themselves are disposed to fancy others deficient in attention to them, and as it never occurs to them why those attentions are withheld, they have no other way of accounting for the neglect, but to charge the neglecter with being envious of their qualities, or vain of his own. With that deep humility which is the groundwork of his profession, the Christian alone attains to real dignity of character. If we reckon those men great who rise high, and make a distinguished figure in the world, how much higher is his claim to greatness who looks down on what the others glory in, who views with indifference the things to which the world accounts it greatness to aspire, and the consummation of greatness to attain.

The proud man by not cordially falling in with the Christian scheme—which, if he thoroughly adopted, would shrink to nothing these bloated fancies—contracts, in effect, the duration of his existence, and reduces to almost nothing the sphere in which his boasted dignity is to be exercised. The theatre on which he is satisfied to act, is limited to the narrow stage of this world; and even on this vanishing scene, how far are the generality from being considerable actors! Pride, therefore, is something worse than fatuity, for whether the stake be high or low, it is sure to play a losing game. It is difficult to say which lot will be most terrible; his, who, having performed an obscure and painful part in this short drama, and having neglected to seek that kingdom promised to the poor in spirit, closes his life and hopes together; or his, who, having had a conspicuous part assigned him here, submits, when the curtain drops, not merely to be nothing, but oh! how much worse than nothing! Absorbed in the illusions and decorations of this shifting spectacle, or intoxicated with the plaudits of the spectators, the interminable scenes which lie beyond the grave, though, perhaps, not absolutely disbelieved, have been totally neglected to be taken into his brief reckoning.

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Now, if pride were really a generous principle, if its tumor were indeed greatness, surely the soul which entertains it would exert its energies on a grander scale! If ambition were indeed a noble sentiment, would it not be pointed to the noblest objects; would it not be directed to the sublimest end? Would not the mind which is filled with it, achieve a loftier flight? Would it stoop to be cooped up within the scanty precincts of a perishing world? True ambition would raise its votary above the petty projects which every accident may overturn, and every breath destroy, which a few months *may*, and a few years *must*, terminate. It would set him upon reflecting, that all the elevation of intellect, all the depth of erudition, all the superiority of rank, all the distinction of riches, is only held by the attenuated thread that attaches him to this world—a world which is itself "hung upon nothing." True ambition would instruct him, that he is not really great who is not great for eternity; that to know the heighth and depth, the length and breadth, of the knowledge of God, and of his eternal love in Christ Jesus, is the consummation of all knowledge, the top of all greatness, the substance of all riches, the sum of all wisdom; that the only object sufficiently capacious to satisfy the grasping desires, to fill the hungering soul of man, is that immortality which is brought to light by the gospel. That state which has God for its portion, and eternity for its duration, is alone commensurate to the grandeur of a soul redeemed by the blood of Christ. This holy ambition would show him, that there is a littleness in whatever has boundaries, a penury in every thing of which we can count the value, an insignificance in all of which we perceive the end.

Let it, then, ever be considered as a destitution of true greatness, practically to blot out eternity from its plan. As a consequence, let that be truly designated "the wisdom from above," which makes eternity the grand feature in the aspect of our existence. And this ambition, be it remembered, is the exclusive property of the humble Christian. *His* desires are illimitable—*he* disdains the scanty bounds of time—*he* leaps the narrow confines of space. He it is who monopolizes ambition. *His* aims soar a bolder flight—*his* aspirations are sustained on a stronger pinion—*his* views extend to an immeasurable distance—*his* hopes rest in an interminable duration.

Yet if his felicity does not, like that of secular ambition, depend on popular breath, still it subsists on dependence. It subsists upon a trust which never disappoints—upon a mercy

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which is never exhausted—upon a promise which never deceives—upon the strength of an arm which "scattereth the proud in the imagination of their hearts"—on a benignity which "exalteth the meek and humble"—on a liberality, which, in opposition to worldly generosity, "fills the hungry alone with good things," and which, contrary to human vanity, sends only "the rich empty away."

Humility is an attribute of such antipathy to the original constitution of our nature, that no principle can possibly produce it in its full extent, and bring it to its complete maturity, but that of the gospel of Jesus Christ. No spirit short of this can enable us to submit our understanding, to subdue our will, to resign our independence, to renounce ourselves.

This principle not only teaches us to bow to the authority and yield to the providence of God, but inculcates the still harder lesson of submitting to be saved in the only way he has appointed—a way which lays pride in the dust. If even, in the true servants of God, this submission is sometimes interrupted—if we too naturally recede from it—if we too reluctantly return to it, it is still owing to the remains of pride, the master sin; a sin too slowly discarded even from the renewed nature. This partial conquest of the stubborn will, this imperfect resignation, this impeded obedience, even in the real Christian, is an abiding proof that we want farther humbling, a mortifying evidence that our hearts are not yet completely brought under the dominion of our principles.

CHAP. XIV.

On Retirement.

An old French wit says, that "ambition itself might teach us to love retirement, as there is nothing which so much hates to have companions." Cowley corrects this sentiment with one equally lively and more sound, that "ambition, indeed, detests to have company on either side, but delights above all things in a train behind, and ushers before." To seek therefore a retreat till we have got rid of this ambition, or fly to retirement as a scene of pleasure or improvement, till the love of the world is eradicated from the heart, or at least till this eradication is its predominant desire, will only conduct the discontented mind to a long train of fresh disap-

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pointments, in addition to that series of vexations of which it has so constantly complained in the world.

The amiable writer already referred to, who has as much unaffected elegance and good sense in his prose works, as false taste and unnatural wit in his poetry, seems not to be quite accurate when he insists in favor of his beloved solitude, that "a minister of state has not so much business in public as a wise man has in private; the one," says he, "has but part of the affairs of one nation, the other has all the works of God and nature under his consideration." But surely there is a manifest difference between our having great works under our consideration, and having them under our control. He assigns, indeed, high motives for the purposes of retreat, but he does not seem to assign the highest. Should he not have added in conjunction with the objects he enumerates, what should be the leading object of the retirement of the good man, the study of his own heart, as well as of inanimate nature; of the word, as well as of the works of God?

He who has spent his life in the study of mankind, till he is weary both of the study and of its object, will, with a justly framed mind, be well prepared for retirement. He will delight in it as an occasion for cultivating a more intimate acquaintance with his Maker and with himself. He will seek it not merely as the well-earned reward of a life of labor, but as a scene, which, while it advances his present comfort, furnishes him with better means for preparing for a better life. We often hear of the necessity of being qualified for the world; and this is the grand object in the education of our children, overlooking the difficult duty of qualifying them for retirement. But if part of the immense pains which are taken to fit them for the company of others were employed in fitting them for their own company, in teaching them the duties of solitude as well as of society, this earth would be a happier place than it is; a training suitable to a world of such brief duration, would be a better preparatory study for a world which will have no end.

Leisure with dignity is a classic phrase which carries to the taste and to the heart the mingled ideas of repose, elegance, and literature. It is, indeed, an honorable state of enjoyment. It has been sung by the poet, and extolled by the philosopher. Its delights have been echoed by those who seek it, and by those that shun it; by those who desire its possession, and by those who are satisfied with its praise; by those who found their fondness on a happy experience, and by those who had rather admire than enjoy it.

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Tumult, indeed, is to be avoided as a great impediment to that interior peace, without which outward stillness is of little value. But let us bear in mind that it is more easy to escape from the tumult of the world than of the passions. Before, therefore, we expect immunity from care in our projected retreat, let us inquire what is our object in retiring. We may deceive ourselves in this pursuit as we have done in others. We may fancy we are retiring from motives of religion, when we are only seeking a more agreeable mode of life. Or we may be flying from duty, when we fancy we are flying from temptation. We may flatter ourselves we are seeking the means of piety, when we are only running away from the perplexities of our situation; from trials which make, perhaps, a part of our duty. To dislike these is natural; to desire to escape from them is innocent, generally laudable. Only let us not persuade ourselves that we are influenced by one motive when we are acting from another. The design may be even good, but let us not deceive ourselves with the idea of its being better than it is. Let us not boast that we are making a sacrifice to duty, when we are consulting, however innocently, our own ease or convenience. In retreating into the country for peace of mind, the temper you would find you must carry thither. Those who retire on no other principle but to escape trouble without turning their leisure to the benefits it is calculated to impart, are happy only on the low condition of being useless. If we retire upon the motive of "soul, take thine ease," though neither covetousness nor sensuality be the prompting principle, if our object be a slothful indulgence, a retirement which does not involve benefit to others, as well as improvement to ourselves, we fail of the great purpose for which we came into the world, for which we withdraw from it.

But while we advert to the highest object as the best, we are far from insinuating that the taste, especially so right a taste, may not be indulged from motives of an inferior nature; far from thinking that we are not justified in preferring a tranquil to a bustling scene, and adopting a more rational, even if it be not a more religious plan of life. There is something almost like virtue in the good taste which prefers it; only, that as in intellectuals good taste must have its substratum in good sense, so in morals it should have its substratum in principle. But if any one thinks that merely by retiring from the world, he shall get rid of his own evil tempers, solitude is the worst choice he could make. It may, indeed, through the grace of God, be made eventually beneficial; for

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though his interior burthen, so far from being lightened, will be more oppressively felt, yet its very oppressiveness, by leading him to look into the cause, may lead to its removal; he may be drawn to religion to get rid of himself, as he was driven to retirement to get rid of his cares.

No second causes act but by the direction of the first. The visible works of God, though so admirably calculated to stir up devotion in the heart, have not commonly, especially when habit makes them familiar, been found to produce this effect. Some of the school divines made a just distinction, when they compared inanimate and intelligent beings, in reference to the supreme Creator, by saying that the one only exhibit the footsteps of God, while the other represent his face.

It was worthy of the munificence of omnipotent bounty, not only to spread the earth with a rich profusion of whatever is necessary and pleasant to animal life, but with whatever might invite to contemplative and intellectual life; not only to sustain, but to gratify; not only to nourish, but to improve; by endless variety awakening curiosity, and by curiosity exciting research. The country is favorable to the study of natural history; furnishing both the leisure and the materials. It sets the mind upon thinking, that if the objects of God's creation are so wonderful, *Himself how wondrous then!*

The mind, indeed, which is looking out for good, finds "sermons in stones, and good in every thing." To minds of an opposite make, use destroys the effect, even if novelty had produced it. Little habituated to reflection, they soon learn to behold a grove of oaks with no higher feeling than a street of shops, and are as little soothed with the murmurs of a rivulet, as with the clatter of hackney coaches. Where sloth predominates in the character, we are disposed to consider the retreat from which he had promised ourselves so much advantage, as furnishing a refuge for idleness rather than a place for reflection. If vanity and vivacity predominate, we shall value the loveliest scenery we have been embellishing, rather as means to attract company and commendation, than as a help to assist our better thoughts, and lift our hearts to holy aspirations.

Though piety is no local thing, yet it has locality. That being is but a bad authority whom Milton makes proudly to exclaim, "The mind is its own place;" and the Stoics carried their haughty mental independence too far, in asserting that local circumstances made no difference in the condition of man. Retirement is assuredly favorable to the advancement of the best ends of our being. There the soul has freer means

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of examining into its own state, and its dependence upon God. It has more unobstructed leisure for enjoying with its Maker,

Communion sweet, communion large and high.

It has ampler means for reiterating the consecration of its powers and faculties to him who gave them, than it could easily find in those broken snatches and uncertain intervals which busier scenes afforded. But then we must be brought into a state and condition to reap benefit from retreat. The paralytic might as reasonably expect to remove his disease by changing his position, as the discontented to allay the unruly motions of a distempered mind merely by retiring into the country.

A great statesman, whom many of us remember, after having long filled a high official situation with honor and ability, began at length impatiently to look forward to the happy period when he should be exonerated from the toils of office. He pathetically lamented the incessant interruptions which distracted him, even in the intervals of public business. He repeatedly expressed to a friend of the author, how ardently he longed to be discharged from the oppressive weight of his situation, and to consecrate his remaining days to repose and literature. At length one of those revolutions in party, which so many desire, and by which so few are satisfied, transferred him to the scene of his wishes. He flew to his rural seat, but he soon found that the sources to which he had so long looked, failed in their power of conferring the promised enjoyment; his ample park yielded him no gratification but what it had yielded him in town, without the present drawback; there he had partaken of its venison without the encumbrance of its solitude. His hamadryads, having no despatches to present, and no votes to offer, soon grew insipid. The stillness of retreat became insupportable; and he frankly declared to the friend above alluded to, that such was to him the blank of life, that the only relief he ever felt was to hear a rap at the door. Though he had before gladly snatched the little leisure of a hurried life for reading, yet when life became all leisure, books had lost their power to interest. Study could not fill a mind long kept on the stretch by great concerns in which he himself had been a prime mover. The history of other times could not animate a spirit habitually quickened by a strong personal interest in actual events. There is a quality in our nature strongly indicative that we were formed for active and useful purposes. These, though of a calmer kind, may be still pursued in re-

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tirement under the influence of the only principle powerful enough to fill the heart which fancies itself emptied of the world. Religion is that motive yet quieting principle, which alone delivers a man from perturbation in the world and inanity in retirement; without it, he will in the one case be hurried into impetuosity, or in the other be sunk into stagnation. But religion long neglected "will not come when you do call for it." Perhaps the noble person did not call.

It is an obvious improvement in the taste and virtue of the present day, that so many of our dictators retire, not to the *turf*, but to the *plough*; that they make an honorable and pleasant exchange of the cares and vexations of political life for the tranquil and useful pursuits of agriculture. Such pursuits yield comparative repose, and produce positive good. Besides this, the modern Cincinnatus will have the gratification of finding how much he has gained by the change in his choice of instruments, for he will see that "all sheep and oxen, yea, and all beasts of the field," are far less perverse, faithless, and intractable than the indocile human agents whom he has been so long laboring to break in, and bring under the yoke.

But whatever he may have gained in these respects, if the philosophical and political agriculturist do not make it part of his arrangement, as we hope he does, that the cultivation of personal piety shall divide his time and his thoughts with the cultivation of his paternal acres, he will not find his own passions more tractable, his own appetites more subdued, his own tempers better regulated, because the theatre in which they are exercised is changed from contentious senates to blooming meadows. There is no power in the loveliest scenery to give that character to the mind on which its peace depends. It is true his innocent occupations will divert ambition, but it requires a more powerful operation to cure it. Ambition is an intermittent: it may, indeed, be cooled, but without piety it will be cooled as the patient in an ague is cooled "in the well day between the two fits;" he will be looking back on the fever he has escaped, and forward to that which he is anticipating. There is but one tonic powerful enough to prevent the return of the paroxysm. He will find the perusal of the Bible not less compatible than that of the Georgics with his interesting occupation. While he is actually enjoying the lovely living images under which the inspired writers represent the most delightful truths of religion, he may realize the analogies intellectually, he may be, indeed, conducted "to green pastures" and led beside "the

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still waters of comfort" in the highest sense of those beautiful metaphors.

What a blessing is it to mankind, when they, whose large domains confer on them such extensive local influence, give their views a wider range, and take in an ampler compass of beneficial patronage; when they crown their exertions for the public good by the pious education of their young dependents, by promoting the growth of Christianity as assiduously as the breed of sheep; by extending the improvement of the soil to the moral cultivation of those whom Providence, having committed to their protection for that very purpose, will require at their hands.

With the deepest gratitude to God, let it be observed how many of these great persons, with a spirit more honorable to them than their coronets or any earthly distinction, have stood forward as the avowed patrons of the noble institution for dispersing the Bible into all countries, after having transfused it into every dialect of every language. When we consider the object, and view the rapidity, and trace the success, are we not almost tempted to fancy that we see the angel in the Revelation flying in the midst of heaven, carrying "the everlasting gospel to preach unto them that dwell in the earth, and to every nation, and kindred, and tongue, and people?"*

It is indeed a spectacle to warm the coldest and to soften the hardest heart, to behold men of the first rank and talents, statesmen who have never met but to oppose each other, orators who have never spoken but to differ, each strenuous in what it is presumed he believes right, renouncing every interfering interest, sacrificing every jarring opinion, forgetting all in which they differed, and thinking only on that in which

* May an old and attached member of the Society for promoting Christian Knowledge be allowed to offer her opinion (though irrelevant to the subject of this chapter) upon the complete establishment of the argument in favor of the Bible Society, from its not injuring its venerable predecessor? It is now obvious, that the benefits of the new institution are effected without detriment to the old, from its having excited fresh friends to its cause, and raised additional funds for its support. Reasoning indeed from analogy, would the benefactor, whose means were competent to both, refuse his patronage to the Middlesex hospital because he was already a subscriber to St. George's? When he saw that other contributors neither withdrew nor diminished, but especially when he saw that they augmented, their bounty to the elder establishment, would he not bid God speed to the younger? Would he not rejoice that a new source was opened for healing *more* diseases, for relieving *more* wants? In the distribution of the Bible, are not both institutions streams issuing from the same fountain of love, both flowing into the same ocean of good? If we may be allowed the application, "they are diversities of gifts, but the same spirit;" "they are differences of administration, but it is the same God that worketh all in all."

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they agree; each *reconciled to his brother, and leaving his gift at the altar*, offering up every resentment at the foot of the cross! There might be two opinions how men should be governed, there can be but one whether they should be saved.

We ought not to doubt that a portion of that generous zeal with which they disseminate the word of life to others, will be exerted in increasing their own personal acquaintance with it. To dispense the grand instrument of salvation to others, forgetful of our own interest in it, is one of the few instances in which disinterestedness would be criminal: while here, to participate in the blessing we bestow, is one of the rare occasions in which self-love is truly honorable. May we, without offence, without the remotest idea of any thing personal, hazard the observation that it is possible to be made the instrument, not only of temporal, but eternal good to others, without reaping ourselves any advantage from the good we communicate?

It might have supplied a thesis for disputation among the whimsical subtleties of the old school divines, which was the more blamable extreme, to possess the Bible ourselves without imparting the blessing to others, or to communicate it to them without using it ourselves. Unfortunately, however, this cause for casuistry was cut short, by their refusing the Bible altogether to the laity.

It is with reluctance we turn from subjects of grateful panegyric to those presented to us by the same class of society for animadversion. With regret we take leave of scenes enriched and dignified by the beneficial presence and exertions of their lords, for the dreary prospect of deserted mansions and abdicated homes. To not a few of the rich and great, their magnificent houses are rather a cumbrous appendage of grandeur, places to which strangers resort to admire the splendor of the proprietors, and the portraits of their ancestors, than what Providence intended, a rich additional ingredient in their own overflowing cup of blessings. Their seats are possessed without being enjoyed. They appear, indeed, to combine the advantages of retreat with those of opulence. But it is only appearance. Do not too many of their owners strive to dispossess the scene of every attribute appended to it? Do they not chiefly derive what little they know of the charms of the country from the descriptions of the poet—of the diversities of landscape from the painters of the opera-scene—of the delights of retirement from the moralist, the philosopher, and, more frequently, the novelist? They con-

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trive to transfer to their rural abodes every thing of the metropolis, except its buildings, and to the metropolis every movable appendage of rural beauty. Like the imperial Roman glutton, who never tasted fish but at the farthest possible distance from the sea, they enjoy the lovely products of the conservatory, glowing with every hue, and breathing every fragrance, anywhere but where they grow. The most exquisite flowers yield little delight till transported to the town-residence. There they exhale their sweets amid smoky lamps, and waste them on a fetid atmosphere; exhausting their beauties in the transient festivity of a single night, instead of reserving them to decorate retreat, and add one attraction more to the charms of home and the pleasures of retirement.

With these personages, the principal change from town to country consists in the difference between a park and a square. They bring to one the same tastes, the same amusements, and the same inversion of hours which they adopted in the other. They lose the true enjoyment of both, by contriving that neither town nor country shall preserve any distinct character of its own. To some, indeed, the splendid inheritance is considered as little more than a commodious inn in which to repose in their incessant migration from the capital to the watering-place, and from the chalybeate to the sea; without having the too valid plea of attending the sick, or being sick themselves.

But if we compare the domestic scenes from which they are hurrying with the places to which they are resorting, we are inclined to pity them on the score of taste, as much as on the loss of enjoyment. A stranger to our manners who had heard of the self-denial which our religion enjoins, when he compared what they had quitted with what they are flying to, would naturally compliment them on the noble sacrifice which he would conclude they had made to duty. He would admire the zeal which prompted the abandonment of such pure for such turbid pleasures; he would admire the elevation of mind which could submit to such unimposed penance. When he followed them from the splendid mansion to the close and incommodious residence, in which a crowded season sometimes immures the possessors of palaces: when he saw them renounce their blooming gardens, their stately woods, "trees worthy of paradise," for unshaded walks or artificial awnings; their bowers and temples for the unsheltered beach, open to all the rage of the dog-star; the dry, smooth-shaven green, for sinking sands rivalling the soil of Arabia, or burning gravel, which might emulate queen Em-

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ma's ploughshares;—would he not exclaim in rapture, surely these heroic ladies submit to such privations, encounter such hardships, make such renunciations, from motives of the most sublime self-denial! Doubtless they crowd to these joyless abodes, because they could find at home no distresses to be relieved, no innocence to be protected, no wrongs to be redressed, no ignorance to be instructed. Now, would he exultingly add, I have some practical experience of the sacrifices of which disinterested piety is capable. The good they must be doing here is indeed a noble recompense for the pleasures they are giving up.

Unimportant as this gradual revolution in our habits may be thought, there are few things which have more contributed to lower the tone both of society and solitude, than these multiplied and ever multiplying scenes of intermediate and subordinate dissipation. When the opulent divided the year between the town and country residence—the larger portion always assigned to the latter—being stationary in each, as they occupied a post of more obvious responsibility, they were more likely to fulfil their duties, than in these parentheses between both. For these places, to persons who only seek them as scenes of diversion and not as recruits to health, are considered as furnishing a sort of suspension from duty as well as an exoneration from care; the chief value of the pleasures they afford consisting in their not being *home-made*.

We have little natural relish for serious things. It is one great aim of religion to cure this natural malady. It is the great end of dissipated pleasures to inflame it. These pleasures forcibly address themselves to the senses, and thus, not only lower the taste, but nearly efface the very idea of spiritual things. They gradually persuade their votaries, that nothing but what they receive through *their* medium is real. Where the illusions of sense are allowed to make their full impression, the pleasures of religion appear merely visionary; faint shadows at first, and afterwards unexisting things.

If religion makes out certain pleasures to be dangerous, these pleasures revenge themselves in their turn by representing religion to be dull. They are adopted under the specious notion of being a relief from more severe employments; whereas others less poignant would answer the end better, and exhaust the spirits less. If the effect of certain diversions only serves to render our return to sober duties more reluctant, and the duties themselves insipid, if not irksome—if we return to them as to that which, though we do not love, we dare not omit, it is a question even in the article

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of enjoyment, whether we do not lose more than we gain by any recreation which has the effect of rendering that disgusting which might otherwise have been delightful.

But it is never too late for a change of system, provided that change is not only *intended*, but *adopted*. We would respectfully invite those who have been slaves to custom, courageously to break their chain. Let them earnestly solicit the aid which is from above on their own honest exertions. Let them tear themselves from the fascinating objects which have hitherto detained them from making acquaintance with their own hearts. It is but to submit heroically to a little dullness at first, which habit will convert into pleasure, to encounter temptation with a resistance which will soon be rewarded with victory. They will be sensible of one surprising revolution; from the period when they begin to inure themselves to their own company, they will insensibly dislike it less, not so much for the goodness they will find in themselves, as from discovering what a fund of interesting employment, of which they had been so long in search, their own hearts can furnish.

As the scrutiny becomes deeper, the improvement will become greater, till they will grow not so much to endure retirement as to rejoice in it, not so much to subsist without dissipation as to soar above it. If they are not so much diverted, they will be less discomposed. If there are fewer vanities to amuse, there will be fewer disorders to repair; there will be no longer that struggle between indulgence and regret, between enjoyment and repentance, between idleness and conscience, which distracts many amiable, but unfixed minds, who feel the right which they have not courage to pursue. There will be fewer of those inequalities which cost more pain in filling up than they afforded pleasure in creating. In their habits there will be regularity without monotony. There will be a uniform beauty in the even tissue of life; the web, though not so much spangled, will be more of a piece: if it be less glittering in patches, the design will be more elegant: if the colors are less glaring, they will wear better; their soberness will secure their permanence; if they are not gaudy when new, they will be fresh to the end.

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CHAP. XV.

Dangers and Advantages of Retirement.

If some prefer retirement as an emancipation from troublesome duties rather than as a scene of improvement, others choose it as a deliverance from restraint, and as the surest mode of indulging their inclinations by a life of freedom; not a freedom from the dangers of the world, but of following their own will. While we continue in the active world, while our idleness is animated with bustle, decorated with splendor, and diversified with variety, we cheer our erroneous course with the promise of some day escaping from it; but when we sit down in our retreat, unprovided with the well-chosen materials of which true enjoyment is alone compounded, or without proposing to dedicate our retirement to the obtaining them, we are almost in a more hopeless condition than when we lived without reflection in the world. We were then looking forward to the privacy we now enjoy, as to a scene of mental profit. We had in prospect a point which, if ever attained, would be to us the beginning of a new life, a post from which we should start in a nobler race. But the point is attained, and the end is neglected. We are set down in our ultimate position.

But retirement, from which we promised ourselves so much, has produced no change, except from the idleness of tumult that of ennui in one sex, and from levity to apathy in the other. The active life which we had promised to turn into contemplative life is no improvement, if a gay frivolity is only transformed into a dull vacuity. In the world we were not truly active if we did little good; in retirement we are not contemplative, if contemplation is not exercised to the best purposes. It is in vain that we retire from great affairs, if our hearts are stuffed with such as are insignificant. There is less hope of a change in the mind, because there is no probability of a change in the circumstances with which this projected moral alteration used to be connected. Where the outset was froth, and the end is feculence, there may be a difference, but there is no improvement. We shall find in retirement, under new modifications, the same passions, tempers, and weaknesses, which we had proposed to leave behind us, without the same pretence of wanting time to watch

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against them. If we settle down in petty systematic trifling, it is not the size of the concern, but the spirit in which it is pursued, that makes the difference. The scandal of a village, the intrigues of a little provincial town, may be entered into with as much warmth, and as little profit, as the more imposing follies of the metropolis.

Retirement, therefore, though so favorable to virtue, is not without its dangers. Taste, and, of course, conversation, is liable to degenerate. Intellect is not kept in exercise. We are too apt to give to insignificant topics an undue importance; to become arbitrary; to impose our opinions as laws; to contract, with a narrowness of thinking, an impatience of opposition. Yet while we grow peremptory in our decisions, we are, at the same time, liable to individual influence; whereas in the world, the injurious influence of one counsellor is soon counteracted by that of another; and if, from the collision of opposite sentiments, we do not strike out truth, we experience, at least, the benefit of contradiction. If those with whom we associate are of an inferior education and cast of manners, we shall insensibly lower our standard, thinking it sufficiently high if it be above theirs, till we imperceptibly sink to their level. The author saw, very early in life, an illustration of these remarks, in a person who had figured in the ranks of literature. He was a scholar and a poet. Disappointed in his ambitious views of rising in the church, a profession for which he was little calculated, he took refuge in a country-parsonage. Here he affected to make his fate his choice. On Sundays he shot over the heads of the inferior part of his audience, without touching the hearts of the better informed; and, during the week, paid himself for the world's neglect by railing at it. He grew to dislike polished society, for which he had been well qualified. He spent his mornings in writing elegies on the contempt of the world, or odes on the delights of retirement, and his evenings in the lowest sensuality with the most vulgar and illiterate of his neighbors.

Another danger is that of aspiring to become the sun of our little system, since the love of popularity is not exclusively attached to public situations. In the world, indeed, if there be not a real, there must at least be a spurious merit to procure it, whereas, when there are no competitors, it is easy to be popular; to be admired by the uncultivated, and flattered by the dependent, may be the attainment of the most moderately gifted. Let us not, therefore, judge of ourselves by acclamations, which would equally follow the worthless, if

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they filled the same situation. If we do not remember to distinguish between our merit and our place, we shall receive the homage, not as a debt of gratitude or a bait for bounty, but as a tribute to excellence. From being accustomed to flattery, we shall exact it as a right; from not being opposed, we shall learn not to endure opposition.

Besides the danger of contracting supercilious habits if surrounded with inferiors, there is also that of indulging a censorious spirit on comparing our own habits with those of persons who live in the world, and of overrating our own exemption from practices to which, from indolence, we have no inducement, and, from circumstances, no opportunity. When we compare our hearts and lives with those of whom we know little, let us not forget to compare also, with others, our situations and temptations. The comparative estimates we make in our own favor are frequently fallacious, always dangerous. Many who live in the world have a mortified spirit, while others may bring to a cloister hearts overflowing with the love of that world from which it is easier to turn our faces than to withdraw our affections.

Secluded persons are sometimes less careful to turn to profit small parcels of time, which, when put together, make no inconsiderable fund. Reckoning that they have an indefinite stock upon hand, they neglect to devote each portion to its definite purpose. The largeness of their treasure makes them negligent of small, but incessant, expenses. For instance; instead of light reading being used as a relief from severer studies, and better employments, it is too frequently resorted to as the principal expedient for getting over the tediousness of solitude; people slide into the indulgence to such an excess, that it becomes no longer the relaxation, but the business. The better studies, which were only to be relieved, are superseded; they become dull and irksome; what was once pleasure is converted into a dry duty, and the duty is become a task. From this plenitude of leisure there is also a danger of falling into general remissness. Business which may be done at any time, is, for that very reason, not done at all. The belief that we shall have opportunities enough to repair an omission, causes omissions to be multiplied.

From the *dangers* of retirement, we come now to the more pleasant topic of its *advantages*. The retired man cannot even pretend that his character must of necessity be melted down in the general mass, or cast into the general mould. He, at least, may think for himself, may form his own plans, keep his own hours, and, with little intermission, pursue his

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own projects. He is less enslaved to the despotism of custom, less driven about by the absurd fluctuations of fashion. His engagements and their execution depend more immediately on himself; his understanding is left unfettered, and he has less pretence for screening himself under the necessity of falling in with the popular habits when they militate against convenience and common sense.

Many of the duties of retirement are more fixed and certain, more regular in their recurrence, and obvious as to their necessity. As they are less interrupted, the neglect of them is less excusable. In the world, events and engagements succeed each other with such rapidity and pleasure, that the imagination has hardly time or incitement to exercise itself. Where all is interruption or occupation, fancy has little leisure to operate. But if, in retirement, where this faculty finds full leisure both for exercise and for chastisement; if the undisciplined mind is left entirely to its mercy, the guilt will be enhanced, and the benefit lost; it will be ever foraging for prey, and, like other marauders, instead of stopping to select, will pick up all the plunder that falls in its way, and bring in a multitude of vain thoughts to feed upon, as an indemnification for the realities of which it is deprived. The well regulated mind, in the stated seasons devoted to the closet, should therefore severely discipline this vagrant faculty. They who do not make a good use of *these* seasons of retirement, will not be likely to make a good use of the rest. The hour of prayer or meditation is a consecration of the hours employed in the business, whether of society or solitude. In those hours we may lay in a stock of grace, which, if faithfully improved, will shed its odor on every portion of the day.

If general society contribute more to smooth the asperities of manner, to polish roughness, and file off sharpnesses, retirement furnishes better means for cultivating that piety which is the only genuine softener of the temper. Without this corrective, even the manners may grow austere, and the language harsh. But while the benevolent affections are kept in exercise, and the kindly offices of humanity in operation, there will be little danger that the mind will become rough and angular from the want of perpetual collision with polished bodies. The exercise of beneficence, too, in the country is accompanied with more satisfaction, as the good done is less equivocal. In great cities, and especially in the metropolis, some charitable persons chiefly content themselves with promoting public subscriptions, and superintending pub-

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lic charities, for want of knowing the actual degree of individual distress or the truth of private representation. Here all the advantage lies on the side of the country resident. The characters, as well as wants, of the poor are specifically known, and certainly the immediate vicinity of the opulent has the more natural, though not the sole claim, to their bounty.

Retirement is calculated to cure the great infirmity, I had almost said the mortal disease, of not being able to be alone; it is adapted to relieve the wretched necessity of perpetually hanging on others for amusement; it delivers us from the habit of depending, not only for our solace, but almost for our existence, on foreign aid, and extricates us from the bondage of submitting to any sort of society in order to get rid of ourselves. It is very useful sometimes thus to make experiments on our own minds, to strip ourselves of helps and supports, to cut off whatever is extrinsic, and, as it were, to be reduced to ourselves. We should thus learn to do without persons and things, even while we have them, that we may not feel the privation too strongly when they are not to be had. These self-denials constitute the true legitimate self-love, as the multiplying of indulgences is the surest way to mortification.

Those to whom change is remedy, and novelty gratification, though the change be for the worse, and the novelty be a loss, are the first to bewail the disappointment which every one else foresaw. We hear those complain most that they can get no quiet, whose want of it arises from the irruptions of their own passions. Peace is no local circumstance. It does not depend on the situation of the house, but of the heart. True quiet is only to be found in the extirpation of evil tempers, in the victory over unruly appetites; it is found, not merely in the absence of temptation, but in the dominion of religion. It arises from the cultivation of that principle, which alone can effectually smooth down the swellings of pride, still the restlessness of envy, and calm the turbulence of impure desires. It depends on the submission of the will, on that peace of God which passeth all understanding, on the grace of Christ, on the consolations of the Spirit. With these blessings, which are promised to all who seek them, we may find tranquillity in Cheapside; without them, we may live a life of tumult on the Eddystone.

Those who are more conversant with poetic than pious composition; who have fed their fancy with the soothing dreams of pastoral bards; who figure to themselves a state of

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pure felicity among the guileless beings with whom a fond imagination peoples the scenes of rural life, expect, when they retire into the country, to meet with a new race of mortals, pure as the fabled inhabitants of the golden age—spotless beings, who were not included in the primeval curse—creatures who have not only escaped the contamination of the world, but the original infection of sin, that sin which they allow may be caught by contact, but which they do not know is a homeborn, homebred disease. It is indeed a most engaging vision, to associate indivisibly with the lovely scenes of nature the lovelier form of purity: but, alas! "such scenes were never!" The groves and lawns of the country no more make men necessarily virtuous, than the brick and mortar of the church make them necessarily pious. The enthusiast of nature, while he enjoys even to rapture her unpolluted charms, must not, however, expect to find in retirement that unsullied innocence which the disappointed Cowley looked for in his retreat at Chertsey; which, after his woful failure there, he continued to persuade himself he should still find in America; which his own Claudian vainly believed might be obtained by his interesting *Old Man of Verona*, on escaping from that city; which even the patriarch Lot found not, in escaping from a worse city than Verona.

Perhaps the vivid imagination of Cowley, in his eager longings for America, like that of some more recent enthusiasts, might have been kindled by the alluring appellation of the *New* World. This seducing epithet might convey to his impressible mind the idea of something young and original, and uncontaminate; something that might excite the notion, not of a new found, but new created world, fresh and fair and faultless. But even the disjunction of continents, which was then believed, produces no such distinction in the human character: the native evil pursues the man

Far as th' equator thrice to the utmost pole.

All experience, all history, especially that history which is supremely the record of truth, rouses us from the bewitching dream, and subverts the fair idea. It was in a garden, a garden, too, "chosen by the sovereign Planter," that the first sin, the prolific seed of all subsequent offences, was committed. It was in a retirement more profound than any we can conceive, for it was in a world of which we know only of four inhabitants, and those of rural occupations, that the first dreadful breach of relative duties was made; that the first murder, and that of the dearest connection, was perpetrated. And

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though the treason of Gethsemane was, in the divine counsels, overruled to repair the defection of Eden, yet, to show how little local circumstances influence action, and govern principle, a garden was the scene were that treason was accomplished.

God would not have provided so ill for the welfare of his creatures, who, from the constitution of their nature, could not have subsisted but in communities, if seclusion had been necessary to salvation. That it is the most favorable scene for the production of virtue and the promotion of piety we have fully admitted. In the world temptations meet us at every corner. In retirement, it is we who make the advances. He who had tried the extremes of public and private life, who had been a shepherd and a king, and who knew the dangers of both conditions, has given no exclusive instructions to the cottage or the throne. He gives a general exhortation to "commune with our own hearts, and be still;" an injunction equally applicable to the sceptre and the crook; and, in his own case, he says, "I have poured out my heart by myself;" but neither is the injunction or the example limited to the world or to retirement, for such pious practices equally belong to both. Yet it must be confessed he dwells on pastoral scenes and rural images, with a fondness of which no traces are to be found in his allusion to courts or cities.

But whether we are in public or retired life, our inattention to the reason why we were sent into our present state, is one grand cause of the miseries we endure in it. In the world, as we before observed, we are more governed by our senses; in solitude, by our imagination. Both have a tendency to mislead us. The latter tells us we were not sent into this state to suffer, but to enjoy; and the senses revolt at the sufferings which the imagination had not taught us to expect. To think of exempting ourselves from pain, instead of expecting it and preparing for it, is the common error of those who overlook or mistake the end of their being. In the hope of this exemption, we fly to one resource after another, thinking that the ease which has hitherto eluded us is not attained only because we have not sought it in the right way; that *all* expedients have not yet been tried; that *all* resources are not yet exhausted. Thus we take fresh comfort from the persuasion, that if we have missed of happiness, it is not because happiness is not the proper state of mortal man, nor the prohibited condition of his being, but because we have erred in our pursuit, and shall still find it in the scheme we are next about to adopt.

A bad judgment contributes to our infelicity almost as

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much as bad dispositions. It is by these false estimates of life that life is made unhappy. It is from expecting from any state more than it has to bestow, that so little is enjoyed in any. He who is discontented in retirement had perhaps previously amused his vacant hours in collecting all the possibilities of happiness; but had generally caught and fixed her most alluring image in that projected retirement for which his worldly indulgences were every day more disqualifying him.

Far be it from me to aim at inspiring disgust at human life, or any despair of the real happiness which is attainable in it. This attainment is a simple process: to contract our desires, that they may be always fewer than our wants; not to expect from this life more than God meant we should find in it; neither to be governed by sense or fancy, but by the unerring word and will of God; to think constantly that the happiness of a Christian will always be more in hope than in possession; to remember that though deep and bitter sufferings are incident to our frame and state, yet the heaviest and the worst are those which man inflicts on man, or his own passions on himself; that we are only truly and irremediably unhappy when we fasten our desires on objects unsuitable or unattainable—objects neither commensurate to our higher nature, nor adapted to our future hope.

CHAP. XVI.

An Inquiry why some good sort of People are not better.

THERE is a class of pleasing and amiable persons whom it would be difficult not to love, and unjust not to respect; but of whom, though candor obliges us to entertain a favorable hope, yet we are compelled to say, that their general conduct is rather blameless than excellent; their practice rather unoffending than exemplary; that their character rather exhibits a capacity for higher attainments, than any demonstration that such attainments are actually made.

These are the people who, from their sobriety of deportment and orderly habits, we should be naturally led to expect would make a great proficiency in religion. They are seldom hurried into irregularities; discretion is their cardinal virtue; they are frequently quoted as patterns of decorum; the finger of reproach can seldom be pointed at their

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conduct; that of ridicule, never. They are not seldom kind and humane, feeling and charitable; they fill many relative duties in a manner which might put to the blush not a few, from whose higher profession better things might have been expected.

"You have sketched a perfect character," methinks I hear some angry reader exclaim. What more does society demand? What more would the most correct man require in his son or his wife, his sister or his daughter?

We are indeed most ready to allow, that few, comparatively, go so far; we grant that the world would be a much less disorderly and vexatious scene than it is, if the greater number reached these heights, which we yet presume to consider as inadequate to the requisitions of the gospel, as insufficient to answer the claims of Christianity. Would it not be a very melancholy consideration, if this most encouraging circumstance, of their being *not far* from the kingdom of God, should ever—which Heaven avert!—prove a possible reason for their not entering into it; if their being *almost* Christians should be the very preventing cause of their becoming *altogether* such?

Their education has been governed rather by proprieties than principles. They have learned to disapprove of hardly any thing in the way of pleasure for its own sake, but highly to reprobate the extremes to which disorderly people carry it. They censure a thing not so much for being wrong in itself, as for being immoderate in the degree. They condemn all the improper practices against which the world sets its face, but have not very distinct ideas of the right and the wrong in any thing which it tolerates. Religion, which has made a part of their early instruction, took its turn with the usual accomplishments, though subordinately with respect to the earnestness with which it was inculcated, and with about the same proportion of the time allotted to it as minutes bear to hours. It was taught as a needful thing, but not as the *one* thing needful. Religion, however, continues to maintain its appropriate place in their reading, and, to a certain degree, to be adopted into their practice, bearing nearly the same proportion to other objects as it did when they were initiated into its elements. They were bred in its forms, and in its forms they persist to live, if the term *live* can be properly applied to any thing which is destitute of the characters and properties of life. They live, it is true, but it is as the vegetable world lives in the winter's frost, which does not indeed kill it, but benumbs its powers, and suspends its vitality.

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They make a conscience of reading the Scriptures, but sometimes interpret them too much in their own favor, instead of judging of the duties they inculcate by such properties and results as they promise to produce. In making it their study, they neglect to make it their standard.

They deceive themselves on many points, by taking their measures from rules that are not legitimate. One makes his own taste and inclination his measure of practice, another the example of an accredited friend; almost all plead the dread of singularity, the vanity of opposing your judgment to that of the world, and the absurdity of setting up a standard which you know to be unattainable. If you censure the thoughtlessness of the dissipated, they censure it too; lamenting that there should ever be an abuse of things so innocent and lawful. If you represent the beauty of piety, they approve of every kind of excellence in the abstract, but when you appeal to particular instances, refer them to actual exemplifications, they intimate, that, in respect to whatever exceeds their own measure, it carries in it somewhat of assumption and pretence; or else they insinuate, that however proper the thing may be in the persons alluded to, *their* situation admits of an exemption; that what may be justifiable in others differently situated, would be objectionable under *their* circumstances. Thus we involve ourselves in the flimsy web of a delusive sophistry till the error becomes destructive before it is discerned.

Excess of every kind is what they carefully avoid; and excess in religion as much as in any other thing. Under this head they expunge zeal from their catalogue of virtues. The establishment of a correct character is their first object, and the good opinion of the world the instrument by which they establish it. This keeps their views low; though it costs as much pains and precaution to keep up a high reputation on worldly grounds as it would to cultivate the principle itself, whose results would, in some respects, be nearly the same as what they are laboring to attain. *To be* the thing would be a shorter cut to comfort, than by incessant study and effort to keep up its appearance.

Propriety and order, virtues in themselves, obtain for them the reputation of still higher virtues; all that appears is so amiable, that the world readily gives them credit for qualities which are supposed to lie behind, and are only prevented by diffidence from appearing. They carry on with each other an intercourse of reciprocal, but measured flattery; this serves to promote kindness to each other, and esteem for themselves.

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Self-complacency is rather kept out of sight by the delicacy of good-breeding, than subdued by religious conviction. They are rather governed by certain of the more sober worldly maxims, than by the strictness of Christian discipline. Though they fear sin, and avoid it, yet it is to be suspected they most carefully avoid those faults which are most disreputable, and that its impropriety has its full share in their abhorrence with its turpitude.

As to religion, they rather respect than love it. They seem to intimate, that there is something of irreverence in any familiarity with the subject, and place it at an awful distance, as a thing whose mysterious grandeur would be diminished by a too near approach. Another reason why they consider religion rather as an object of veneration than affection, is because they erroneously conceive it to be an enemy to innocent pleasure.

If they are not perfectly good Christians, it is not because they are good Jews, for they do not "talk of the words" which were commanded under that dispensation, *when they sit in their house, and when they walk by the way, and when they lie down, and when they rise up.* Religion engages their regard somewhat in the way in which the laws of the land engage it, as something sacred, from being established by custom and precedent; as a valuable institution for the preservation of the public good; but it does not interest their feelings; they do not consider it so much a thing of individual concern, as of general protection. Of its establishment by authority they think more highly than of its business with their own hearts; of its influence in maintaining general order, than of its efficacy in promoting in themselves peace and joy. In short, they carve out an image of religion not altogether unorthodox, but which, like the uninformed statue of the enamored artist, though a beautiful figure, is without life, or power, or motion.

The more obvious duties being discharged, they are a little inclined to think, that too considerable a portion of their time and talents are left at their own disposal. Large intervals of leisure are rather assumed to be a necessary repose and refreshment from right employments and benevolent actions, and as purchased by their performance, than as having any specific application of their own. In short, things which they call indifferent make up too large a portion of their scheme of life, and in their distribution of time.

The class we are considering are apt to be very severe in their censures of those who have lost their reputation, while

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they are rather too charitable to those who only deserve to lose it. This excessive valuation of externals is not likely to be accompanied with great candor in judging the discredited and the unfortunate. Errors which we ourselves have had no temptation to commit, we are too much disposed to think out of the reach of pardon; and, while we justly commend innocence, we give too little credit to repentance.

The misfortune is, they do not so much as suspect that there is any higher state of being, any degree of spiritual life, beyond what they have attained. They consider religion rather as a scheme of rules than a motive principle, as a stationary point, than a perpetual progress. They consider its observances rather as an end than a means. It is not so much natural presumption which roots them where they are, for, in ordinary cases, they are perhaps diffident and modest; it is not always conceit which prevents their minds from shooting upwards; it is the low notion they entertain of the genius of Christianity; it is the inadequateness of their views with its requirements; it is their unacquaintedness with the spirit of that religion which they profess honestly, but understand indistinctly. This ignorance makes them rest satisfied with a state which did not satisfy the great apostle. While *they* think they have made a progress sufficient to justify them in believing they have "already attained," *his* vast attainments served only to prevent his looking back on them, served only to stimulate him to press forward towards the mark. Some good sort of people, on the contrary, act as if they were afraid of being different from what they are, or of being surprised into becoming better than they intended.

Among the many causes which concur to keep them at a sort of determined distance from serious piety, a not uncommon one is, their happening to hear of the injudicious exhibition of religion in one or more of its high but eccentric professors: these they affect to believe are fair specimens of the so much vaunted religious world. Instead of inquiring what is the true scriptural view of Christianity, that they may make nearer approaches to it, they are far more anxiously concerned to recede, as far as possible, from persons who falsely profess to be its best representatives. They conclude, and, in some instances, but too justly, that the profession of these people has not transformed their hearts, but their connections; that they have adopted a party rather than a principle, embraced a cloud for a goddess, and an opinion instead of a rule of conduct; and they observe that they are unjust in their enmities to other classes, in proportion to the violence

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of their attachment to their own. It is no wonder if, with their partial view of the subject, they should be deterred, when they see these persons act as much below their system as they themselves not seldom live above their own.

But they do not act thus on other occasions. If they meet with an incompetent but blustering lawyer, or an unskilful but presumptuous physician, instead of calumniating the two learned faculties, instead of resolving to have no more to do with either, they avoid the offending individuals, and look out for sounder practitioners. Hence, indeed, it is to be remarked by the way, there arises a new and powerful motive, why all who make a high profession of religion should not only be eminently careful to exhibit an even and consistent practice, but should studiously avoid in their conversation all offensive phrases, and repulsive expressions; why they should not be perpetually intimating, as if *preaching the gospel* was a party-business, and a business entirely confined to their own party.

Worldly observers, of the better sort, cannot sometimes but perceive in the same class of religionists less forbearance in their temper, less patience, less moderation and kindness, than they themselves evince; they also remark in some of them, though it is doubtless done with a view not to subtract from their charities, less generosity and largeness of heart than they see in many of their own class; a petty strictness in their dealings, not quite of a piece with the liberality, I had almost said, with the honesty, of Christianity. Unhappily, they are kept on their guard in the unnecessary dread of being righteous overmuch, by the very peculiarities which, in these persons, indicate a defect rather than a redundancy. These indications, however, which they conceive to be the distinctive marks of the whole tribe, make them stand aloof from Christians of the sounder class, in whom they might have seen, on a nearer approach, a fair and lovely exhibition of the principle by which they are governed.

Another preventing cause of improvement is, their associating familiarly with persons of less worth than themselves. This is injurious in two ways: these sober followers of pleasure sanction its thoughtless devotee by the influence of their respectable character, and give weight to those who would otherwise have none, while, at the same time, they cannot but feel their own decided superiority to those with whom their complaisance unites them; and when they compare themselves with characters so defective, they are in danger of resting still more satisfied with their own moderate, though

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higher, standard. But, to be conscious of being better than those who are bad, is no very solid ground either of comfort or credit.

There is another co-operating cause which keeps down their growth of piety. They are conversant with various classes of writers on different subjects, who do not indeed go farther in their disregard of religion than to let it alone; if they avowedly attacked it, the persons in question would take the alarm, and avoid the perusal of works obviously pregnant with evil. These writers do not always oppose it, but they have nothing to do with it; they virtually say, we have not so much as heard whether there be any Christianity. We are far from meaning that religion ought to be, or that it can, with propriety, be obtruded into subjects of a totally distinct nature. Yet, if its subtle and pervading principle were mixed up with the other ingredients in the mind of the author, the penetrating spirit would occasionally break through, not in matter, but in essence. Where this feeling exists in the heart, a ray of light will sometimes fall unconsciously on subjects which have no immediate connection with it. In a cloudy day, though you do not see the body of the sun, you know, from the light it emits, that it is in its proper station.

But the writers to whom we allude take other ground; they set out with other views; their ethics have another cast. There is a pretty strong implication, especially in compositions of some of our modish itinerants, how good men may be independent of religion. In writers of a sounder cast, though also with these amusement be the professed object, with whatever flowers they strew the path, they entice you into no morasses; you always feel there is a bottom. You go on as much entertained as if you were misled. The pleasure of an uncorrupted mind is not diminished by feeling himself safe, nor is it interrupted while he is gratifying his fancy, by being obliged to watch that no trap is laid for his principles.

To explain, by one or two instances:—Clarendon's and Burnet's Histories of their own Times no more profess to be religious works, than the histories of Hume or Smollet. They are written by men of different political parties, of different professional engagements. Yet, though treating on subjects which naturally excluded any formal descants on religion, there is a predominating tendency which discloses the principles of both; which affords a pledge of their general principles; which makes the reader feel himself safe, because it assures him he is in the hands of a Christian historian.

Again:—In travelling to the Hebrides with Johnson, it is

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no small thing to find, that we can be delighted without being in danger. The tourist, without stepping out of his way to hunt for moral remark or religious suggestion, never forgets that he is a Christian moralist; though in quest of mere amusement, we find our minds enriched with some just sentiment, fortified with some sound principle.

But, in the modish school, the traveller presents his benevolent man, the novelist his perfect character, the moralist his philosopher, the poet his hero, with principles, if not always elaborately in opposition to, yet thoroughly unconnected with, the Christian scheme. It is rather a silent counterworking of its necessity than an overt attack on its truth; for this strong measure is now less resorted to, as more repulsive and less successful. Neglect answers the end better than opposition. The longer any thing is kept out of sight, the less irksome its absence becomes, till, from feeling it not necessary, we proceed to think it not real. The traces of right principle grow faint in the mind, when perpetually hid by interposing objects. The misfortune is, these works make up the larger part of the study of many readers, who do not so much desire to get rid of a stricter scheme, as to lose the perception that they have it not, and the remembrance that, perhaps, they once had it.

CHAP. XVII.

The Inquiry why some good sort of People are not better, continued.

There is one prominent cause which assists in preventing the persons considered in the preceding chapter from making any material proficiency; and it is the very cause, which, if it had been rightly directed, would probably, in such minds, have led to a contrary end,—their choice of *religious* reading; it is confining their pious studies exclusively and systematically to that low standard of divinity, which has cramped the growth of many well disposed persons. The beginning of the last century first presented us with this lax theology; which, though it has still its advocates and followers, they are, we trust, daily declining in numbers and in credit. The excess to which this deteriorated Christianity has been carried in a recent academical exhibition of "*Christian liberty*," and especially in a late series of theological "*Hints*" by a pro-

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fessor of the law, has, it is to be hoped, produced a good effect. When an evil has touched its ultimate point, may we not presume, that the practice may make a gradual retrocession to sound principle? In these, and similar writers, no one but sees that the road to heaven is made far more smooth and easy than the Scriptures have made it; so smooth, as to invite many, and advance none; so easy, that not only, as in the old code, those who run may read, but those who sleep may conquer.

But what still renders this meagre divinity unfortunately too acceptable, is, that it teaches a complacency in our own goodness; that goodness, the acquisition of which is rendered easy, because it falls in so readily with our natural corruptions. The truth is, we require less to be excited to the practice of some insulated virtues, which these authors do not neglect to recommend, than to the abasing of that pride which they rather foster than correct. When we hear so much of the dignity of human nature, we secretly exult in our participation of that dignity; we take to ourselves a full share of that stock of excellence lavishly attributed to our species, and are ready to exclaim, *and I, too, am a man!* These writers make their way to the affections by a plausibility of manner which veils the shallowness of their reasoning. But the great engine of success, as we have already observed, is the prudent accommodation of the reasoning to the natural propensities of the heart, and the flattering the very evils, the existence of which they yet deny. The reader welcomes the doctrines which put him in good humor with himself; he cordially credits the prophesier of smooth things, and is pleased, in proportion as he is not alarmed. That which does not go to the root of the evil—evil which cannot be cured without being disturbed—that which does not irritate the patient, by laying open the peccant part, will be naturally acceptable.

These writers are too much disposed to address their readers as if they were already religious; as requiring, indeed, to be reminded, but not as requiring to be alarmed; as expecting commendation for what they are, rather than admonition as to what they ought to be. They take for granted, what in some cases requires proof, that all are Christians, not in profession, but in reality: and the same uniform class of instructions, or rather of gratuitous positions, is directed to the whole mass, without any individual searchings of the heart, without any distinct address, any discriminating application to that variety of classes of which society is compounded. To the profligate liver, or the more decent sensualist; to the

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sceptical moralist, or the careless believer; to all perhaps, if we might except that most hated heretic, the fanatical over-believer, is the one soothing panegyric, or the one frigid admonition, addressed. We do not pretend to say that virtue is not recommended, but as Seneca and Antoninus had recommended it before, so they had done it better, less vaguely, and more pointedly. Many of the virtues, by the practice of which the readers are taught that salvation is to be obtained, they cannot but feel to be their own virtues; this, while it sets their apprehensions at rest, naturally fills them with complacency in their actual character, instead of kindling an ardent desire after higher attainments. Vices, from which they must be conscious they are exempt, and which they have as little excitement as occasion to practise, are properly censured: but the evil dispositions of the heart, which, if insisted on and pointedly laid open, would set them upon examining their own, are passed over, or lightly treated, or softened down into natural weakness, pardonable imperfection, or accidental infirmity. The heart is not considered as the perennial fountain of all actual offence and error.

A theology which depresses the standard, which overlooks the motives, which dilutes the doctrines, softens the precepts, lowers the sanctions, and mutilates the scheme of Christianity; which merges it in undefined generalities, which makes it consist in a system of morals which might be interwoven into almost any religion—for there are few systems of religion which profess or teach immorality; a theology which neither makes Jesus Christ the foundation, nor the Holy Spirit the efficient agent, nor inward renovation a leading principle, nor humility a distinguishing characteristic; which insists on a good heart, but demands not a renewed heart; which inserts virtues into the stock of the old nature, but insists not on the necessity of a changed nature;—such a theology is not that which the costly apparatus of Christianity was designed to present to us. If it teaches that we have virtues to attain and imperfections to be cured, it insinuates that the one may be attained by our own strength, and the other cured without divine assistance. Our faults, if we have any, are to be surmounted by our reason, and our virtues to be improved from a regard to our comfort and the advancement of our credit; for the satisfaction they afford, and the reputation they procure us. The good man of these writers, like the good man of the ancient Stoics, is so full of virtue as to leave no room for repentance, so faultless that humility would be affectation. Like them they seem almost to di-

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minish the distance between their Maker and themselves, by exalting the man and lowering the Deity.

The persons in question frequently read the Scriptures, and we are ready to wonder that in reading them they do not perceive their disagreement with the authors to whom we allude. There, all the doctrines overlooked by them are pressed in every page: but whether they read without remarking the difference, or whether, though in the use (as we hope) of daily prayer, they neglect to implore that divine spirit which inspired the Scriptures to direct the truths they contain to their hearts; they do not seem to enter into the grand peculiarities of the gospel; nor into the personal interest they have in the doctrines it inculcates, and the precepts it enforces. How many read the account of the fall of Adam as an historical fact, of which they never entertained a doubt, yet without feeling any more individual concern in it than in the fall of Babylon; without being sensible of any corresponding contamination in their own hearts. When told of the self-denying doctrines which Christianity includes, they triumphantly produce passages, not only from Solomon and St. Paul, but from the Savior himself, which completely contradict such gloomy assertions, *that the ways of wisdom are ways of pleasantness, and all her paths are peace;* that *Christ's commands are not grievous;* that *his yoke is easy;* with a multitude of the same animating strain. But they produce them, not so much because they are indeed most delightful truths, as because they are supposed to annul such less engaging texts as are descriptive of *the strait gate*, and *the narrow way*, and *the few who enter them;* of the difficulty with which the rich, that is, those who trust in riches, shall attain to heaven; that *taking up the cross* is an indispensable qualification for the followers of him who suffered on it; with an endless multitude of similar passages.

Now the truth is, there is not the slightest disagreement between these two classes of texts. The unqualified peace, joy, and comfort, expressed in the former, represent what religion is in herself, describe her native excellence, her genuine beauty, her original perfection. Whereas the difficulties attached to the second class arise necessarily from that depravity of the will, that alienation from God and goodness, which renders that irksome which is in itself delightful. To him who knows, because he feels, the natural reluctance of the heart to the requisitions of a religion calculated to produce these happy effects, there is a perfect congruity between the passages thus set in opposition. Though both are true,

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each is consistent with the other; but their truth and consistency strike not those who reject or adopt what best suits their creed or their convenience.

They know, indeed, that they must give a nominal assent to the doctrine of divine assistance, because it is said to be a doctrine of that Scripture which they believe; but they assent to it with implicitness rather than conviction, and if they do allow the intervention of the Holy Spirit, they attach an undue value to human agency. If they say they are far from excluding heavenly aid, their assent somewhat resembles that of the Welsh captain, who, when Henry the Fifth, after the battle of Agincourt, ascribed exclusively the victory to God, coolly replied, "Indeed, he did us great good."

But many of the writers to whom we have adverted, and by whom the persons in question are influenced, seem to make their reverence for the Scriptures a ground for disallowing the agency of the Spirit; as if there were not the most perfect agreement between an appeal to the one and a belief in the other. The spirit of God leads us to no new instructer, but only points us to his word, teaching us to discern it more clearly and to receive it more affectionately. That would be, indeed, an illusion, not an illumination, which would direct us to derive our instruction from any other fountain than the oracles of truth.

These persons are striking instances how dexterously we contrive to turn the scale in our own favor, by balancing some lesser fault to which we are not inclined against some strongly besetting wrong propensity. We seldom soften down any precept that is not pointed at our particular temptation. All the other laws we allow to be not only good and holy, but just, for they only affect other people. The young man in the gospel had no objection to those commandments which were suggested to him as the rule of duty; for he was chaste and honest, neither a disobedient son nor a murderer, neither addicted to idolatry nor profaneness; but the command to dispossess himself of his fortune for charitable purposes cut deep, for he was not only rich, but avaricious. It is thus we prevaricate with duty. We would warp the precept to our passions, instead of bending our inclinations to the duty. We lament the harshness of the command, when we should be lamenting the perversity of the will.

A low standard of religion flatters our vanity, is easily acted up to, does not wound our self-love, is practicable without sacrifices, and respectable without self-denial. It allows the implantation of virtues without eradicating vices, recom-

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mends right actions without expelling wrong principles, and grafts fair appearances upon unresisted corruptions.

This low tone of religion is rendered still more acceptable, from being sprinkled with frequent vituperations of that species of Christianity now derided by a term which was once considered as its specific character. This term, what with the too monopolizing adoption of it by one description of persons, and the contemptuous implication conveyed in the use of it by another, we almost fear to use, lest we should be conjuring up the spirit of fanaticism in the minds of the latter class, or vindicating its exclusive adoption in the language of the former. The assumption of names on the one hand, and, if I may venture so vulgar a phrase, calling names on the other, have been of infinite disservice to religion. Such is the new meaning now assigned to old terms, that we doubt if the application of the epithet in question would not excite a sneer, if not a suspicion, against the character of Isaiah himself, were we to name him by his ancient denomination, *the Evangelical Prophet.* This laconic term includes a diatribe in a word. It is established into a sweeping term of derision of all serious Christians, and its compass is stretched to such an extent, as to involve within it every shade and shape of real or fictitious piety, from the elevated but sound and sober Christian, to the wildest and most absurd fanatic; its large inclosure takes in all, from the most honorable heights of erudition to the most contemptible depths of ignorance. Every man who is serious, and every man who is silly, every man who is holy, and every man who is mad, is included in this comprehensive epithet. We see perpetually that solidity, sublimity, and depth, are not found a protection against the magic mischief of this portentous appellation.

It gratifies us to be assured that our own tone is sufficiently high, and that whatever is higher is erroneous, or superfluous, or hypocritical, or ridiculous. This it is which attaches many a reader to the opposite style of writing, and, in proportion as it attaches him, by reconciling him more to himself, animates him more fiercely against those who make higher requisitions of faith and holiness, those who strip off the mask from actions unfounded in principle, who exact self-abasement, who insist on the necessity of good works, not as a meritorious ground of salvation, but as an evidence of obedience to God, and of conformity to Christ.

Most sincerely do we believe, that there is nothing which the better sort of this class dread more than hypocrisy. But do they not sometimes dread the imputation almost as much

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as the thing? And is it not to be feared that, with the dread of this odious vice being imputed to them, is a little connected the suspicion of its existence in all who go farther than themselves? Are they not too ready to accuse of want of sincerity or of soberness every one who rises above their own level? Is not every degree of warmth in their pious affections, every expression of zeal in their conversation, every indication of strictness in their practice, construed into an implication, that so much as this zeal and strictness exceed their own, there is in them just so much error as that excess involves?

By the class of writers to which they are attached, the pious affections are branded as the stigma of enthusiasm. But a religion which is all brain, and no heart, is not the religion of the gospel. The spirit there exhibited is as far removed from philosophical apathy, as from the intemperate language of passion. There are minds so constituted, and hearts so touched, that they cannot meditate on the incarnation of the Son of God, his voluntary descent from the glory which he had with his Father from all eternity, his dying for us men and for our salvation, with the same unmoved temper with which they acknowledge the truth of any other fact. A grateful feeling, excited by these causes, is as different from a fanatical fervor as it is from a languid acknowledgment. It is not energy, however, which is reprobated, so much as the cause of its excitement. Should the zealous Christian change the object of his admiration, should he express the same animated feeling for Socrates, which the other had expressed for his Savior, his enthusiasm would be ascribed to his good taste, and the object would be allowed to justify the rapture.

But, is not objecting to earnestness in religion to strike out of the catalogue of virtues that quality which so eminently distinguished the scripture worthies? Is it not denying that "spirit of power and of love" which, it is worth observing, the apostle makes the associate of "a sound mind," to deny that Christianity ought to make an impression on the heart, and if on the heart, on the feelings? These fastidious critics place what they call the abstract truths of religion on the same footing with abstract truths in science; they allow only the same intellectual conviction of truth, the same cool assent, in the one case, which is given to a demonstration in the other. But would not he be thought a defective orator at the bar, or in the senate, who should plead as if he did not know that men had feelings to be touched as well as understandings

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to be convinced; who considered the affections as the only portion of character to which he must be careful not to advert, in addressing beings who are feeling as well as intelligent? Shall a fervent rhetoric be admired in one orator, when pleading for the freedom of men, and reprobated in another, when pleading for their salvation? Shall we be enraptured with the eloquent advocate for the Agrarian law, and disgusted with the strenuous advocate for the everlasting gospel? Shall not one man be allowed the same earnestness in combating unbelief, which has immortalized another in execrating Verres?

It must, assuredly, be maintained, that there is such a sober mode of exhibiting truth, as may show that the sacred messenger has no delight in declaring that part of his message which yet it is his duty to deliver; which, while it cannot fail to call forth every feeling of interest for the souls of men, at the same time demands the utmost tenderness, as treating of their dangers. Tenderness, it is true, must not alter truth, nor conceal menaces, which make an awful part of it. Yet a difference may be sometimes inferred by the manner of delivering them. Who has not heard a holy man, who, feeling himself bound to declare the whole counsel of God, has denounced his solemn judgments with a subdued voice, and an almost hesitating accent, speaking as one who felt that he was acquitting himself of a painful, but bounden duty; while another of a coarser make, and a less mortified spirit, proclaims the commanded threat in all the thunders of Sinai; seeming, by his tone and gesture, to rejoice that it has fallen to his lot to alarm, and not to console? The one "persuades men" because he knows "the terrors of the Lord;" the other seems to have his own gratification in terrifying. The one evidently rejoices in being the ambassador of reconciliation; the other appears, but is not, we are assured, really, glad to bear the mandate of condemnation.

But to return to writers in the extreme of the other class. —Vague essays on general and undefined morality, which we here venture to represent as their fault, are very different from distinct discourses or treatises on the several virtues; these latter flow from the study, and teach the improvement of the human heart. But to produce their effect, they must produce their commission. The proclamation must always have the broad seal of Christianity appended to it. It is indeed not only unnecessary, but impossible and imprudent, that in every discourse the whole scheme of Christian doctrine should be laid open. An attempt to do this has fre-

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quently produced confusion by crowding in more materials than the space will contain; and thus leaving the stamp of no one truth distinct upon the mind. We mean no more than that the general impression made should be, that the moral quality under discussion should appear to be explicitly derived from the school of Christ, and the reader not be left to exercise his ingenuity in conjecturing, till the closing sentence informs him, to what system of religion it belongs.

It is also perfectly proper to cut the circle of the virtues into segments, provided it be shown how they are connected with each other, and how the whole fall within the circumference of that divine religion which is their proper centre. It were also to be wished, that there were no undue and hyperbolical exaltation of the virtue under consideration, which often makes a part stand for the whole. This exclusive praise of the quality inculcated, is, to Christianity, what it would be to general geography, if, in order to give an idea of our world, a map of a single country should be exhibited without coast or boundary. It differs from the Christian exhibition of moral virtues, as this insulated map would differ from a chart of the same country when delineated on the globe; there you see not only the country itself correctly displayed, but you perceive by what sea it is bordered, on what land it touches, into what other country some points of this cut deep, and how narrow are the bounds which separate it from some hostile neighbor; you see also its dependence on every thing about it, and its relative situation on the earth.

If we might be allowed another illustration, we would observe, that, to expect to give a just idea of Christianity by any quality, as detached from the whole, would be to resemble a certain Athenian, who, having a palace to sell, took out a single brick from the wall, and produced it at the auction as a specimen of the edifice.

Nor, as we humbly conceive, is it a superfluous care, so to contrive, as that, when it is right to expose any vice to reprobation, the reader who is exempt from it may not too much plume himself upon the exemption. A venerable clergyman once assured the author, that he had never done so much mischief as by the best sermon he had ever preached. It was against the sin of drunkenness. It happened to be an offence to which none of his auditors were addicted. After it was over, some of them expressed no small triumph at their own secure state, from a consciousness of being free from the vice which had been so well exposed, and, as if the exercise of no virtue but the one opposite to the sin in question had

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been necessary, they went home exulting in their own superior goodness.

The writers to whom we have been referring triumphantly distinguish themselves by the appellation of *practical*, in studied opposition to those who are professedly doctrinal. Let it, however, be observed, that, maintaining a due respect for the conscientious of both classes, we only presume to allude, in our animadversion, to those of either side, who carry their specific characteristics into an extreme, in which each excludes its opposite. But far more deficient are the practical discussions of the one, if they want the solid weight and metal of the gospel to make them sterling, than the doctrinal dissertations of the other; which, however, ought never to want the intelligible superscription of practical remark to render them current. Yet is there not sometimes a misnomer in the former appellation? Can that writing be called truly practical which does not attempt greatly to raise the tone of conduct, which does not press practice home on the conscience as flowing from the highest principle, and directed to the noblest end; which is not urged on that ground of argument that is the most cogent, nor inferred from that motive which is the most irresistible, nor impressed by that authority best calculated to secure obedience? The nature of the action commonly participates in the nature of the motive. Practice is not likely to rise higher than the spring which set it agoing.

At the same time, it is but fair to confess, that much of that species of composition which assumes a more spiritual character, is sometimes lamentably deficient in this grand requisite. It begins not seldom by laying a good and solid foundation; but when we lift our eyes to look upon the structure which we expected to see raised upon it, we find it negligently run up, if not totally omitted. Practice seems to be considered as a thing of course, not necessary to be insisted on, much less to have its path clearly chalked out. The use to be made of the doctrine which has been delivered is turned over to the piety or ingenuity of the reader, without any specific direction, or personal application. Too much is left for him to supply, which perhaps, implicitly leaning on his guide, he will not supply, or which, from want of knowledge, he cannot.

Far be it from our intention, however, in thus venturing with real diffidence to compare the faulty extremes in both cases, to assimilate at all their nature or their tendency:—the extreme of adherence to doctrine frequently springing from

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the deepest sense of the infinite importance of that doctrine, and accompanied with a pious willingness to spend and be spent in its propagation. The extreme of adherence to what is called mere morality is too often the lamentable effect of ignorance of doctrine, and of an interest neither felt, nor possessed, nor desired, in doctrinal blessings.

With this guard distinctly kept in view, we venture, with all humility, to repeat, that there is an extreme on both sides: the one may be abstractedly considered as all propositions, the other as all conclusions. The one fails of effect by not depending on just premises; in the other, well established premises produce inferior good, because the conclusions are not sufficiently brought to bear on the actual demands of life. The one, while he powerfully shows the reader that he is a sinner, limits both his proof and his instruction to one or two prominent doctrines; he names, indeed, with unwearied iteration, that only name by which we can be saved, faithfully dwells on the efficacy of the divine remedy, but without clearly pointing out its application to practical purposes. The other presumes his readers to be so wise as to be able to supply their own deficiencies, or so good as to stand in little need of supernatural assistance. Is it not mocking human helplessness, to tell men they must be holy, good, and just, without directing them to the principle from whence "all holy thoughts, all good counsels, and all just works, do proceed"—to direct the stream of action, and keep out of sight the spring from which it must flow—to expect they will renounce sin if they do not renounce self—to send them vagrant in search of some stray virtue, without showing them where to apply for direction to find it?

The combination of the opposite but indispensable requisites is most happily exemplified in all our best divines, living and dead; and, blessed be God, very numerous is the catalogue in both instances. They have, with a large and liberal construction, followed that most perfect exemplification of this union which is so generally exhibited in Scripture, more particularly in that express model, the third chapter of the Epistle to the Colossians. There, every thing that is excellent in practice is made to proceed from him "in whom are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge." There every act has its inspiring motive, every virtue its radical principle; falsehood is not only prohibited to the converts, but the prohibition is accounted for, "*because* ye have put on the new man." The obedience of wives, the affection of husbands, the submission of children, all is to be done "in the

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name of the Lord Jesus." Servants are enjoined to fidelity as "fearing God." "Mercies, kindness, humbleness of mind, meekness, long-suffering," are recommended, *because* the converts "are the elect of God." Every inhibition of every wrong practice has its reference to Christ, every act of goodness its legitimate principle. Contentions are forbidden, forgiveness is enjoined, on the same high ground—the example of "him in whom dwelleth all the fullness of the Godhead bodily." This is *practical preaching*—this is *evangelical preaching*.

CHAP. XVIII.

Thoughts respectfully suggested to good sort of People.

In perusing the foregoing chapter, it may be, as it has been, with unwearied repetition, objected, that it is equally preposterous and unjust, to hold out a standard of religion and morals so high as to defeat, in the reader, all hope of attaining to it. It may be urged, that it would be more prudent, as well as more useful, to propose a more moderate standard, and to suggest a more temperate measure, which would not, as in the present case, by discouraging, render attainment hopeless. For an answer, we must send them to the Redeemer's own mouth, to the excision of the right hand, the plucking out the right eye. This, it will be justly insisted, is not a command, but a metaphor. Granted. We know we are not commanded to lop off our limbs, but our corruptions. But, would he who is not only true, but THE TRUTH, adopt a strong metaphor to express a feeble obligation? Is any tone, then, may we not ask, too high, if not higher than that uniformly employed in the Bible? What do we mean when we say, that we receive the gospel as a rule of faith and practice, if, having made the declaration, we instantly go and, without scruple, lower the rule, and depress the practice?

High and low are indefinite terms: their just use depends on the greatness or littleness of the objects to which they refer. When we consider, that the object in question is eternal life, should the standard which God has made the measure of our attaining to it be so depressed as to prevent that attainment? Do not the apostles and their Master, the saints and the King of saints, everywhere suggest a rule, not only of excellence, but perfection; a rule to the adoption of

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which no hopelessness of attainment is to prevent our stretching forward?

Scripture does, indeed, everywhere represent us as incompetent without divine assistance. But does it not everywhere point out where our strength lies; where it is to be sought; how it is to be attained? It not only shows where our wants may be supplied, but our failures pardoned. Does any one doctrine, any one precept, of the gospel, deal in emollients, prescribe palliatives, suggest petty reliefs, point out inferior remedies, speak of any medicine, but such as is proportioned to the depth of the disease?

Yet it is not uncommon for those whose views have been low, and whose practice, consequently, has not been high, to combine with this mediocrity of character the most exalted expectation of future recompense; to couple a comparatively low faith and conduct with those lofty promises which the New Testament holds out to the most exalted Christian. Many in the day of health and activity would have considered "taking up the cross," "living to him who died for them," &c. &c. as figurative expressions, lively images, not exacting much practical obedience; nay, would have considered the proposal of bringing them into action as downright enthusiasm; yet who has not heard these persons, in a dangerous sickness, repeat with entire self-application the glorious and hard-earned exultation of him, who, after unrivalled sufferings and unparalleled services, after having been "in deaths oft," after having been even favored with a glimpse of heaven, exclaims, "I have fought a good fight, I have finished my course,"—and then go on, with the most delusive complacency, to apply to themselves the sublime apostrophe with which this fine exclamation is wound up,—"henceforth there is laid up for me a crown of glory," &c. &c.: and it has passed into an accredited phrase when one of this sort of Christians speaks of the death of another in the same class, to observe, with an air of triumph, that *he is gone to his reward.* We must confess, that when we hear this assurance so applied, we charitably incline to hope it is not so bad with them as the expression implies: because, if heaven is thus assigned as a payment of work done, one cannot help trembling at a reward apportioned to such worth. For these contractors for heaven, who bring their merit as their purchase-money, and intend to be saved at their own expense, do not always take care to be provided with a very exorbitant sum, though they expect so large a return in exchange for it; while those who, placing no dependence on their works, never

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dare to draw upon heaven for the payment, will often be found to have a much larger stock upon hand, ready to produce as an evidence, though they renounce them as a claim. In both cases, is it not safer to transfer them and ourselves from merit to mercy, as a more humble and less hazardous ground of dependence?

Far be from me the uncharitable presumption, that these sanguine persons are destitute of principle, or void of right intentions. Doubtless, in many instances, they persevere in error for no reason, but because they believe it to be the truth. There is even much that is right in them; but are they not too easily satisfied with a low measure of that right, without examining accurately the quality of the practice, merely because it is not disreputable?

Our knowledge of religion and sound morals must inevitably arise, in a good measure, from the knowledge of ourselves. Now, the kind of reading of which we have complained is so far from improving that knowledge, that it keeps it out of our sight, by representing us to ourselves as other creatures than we really are. The most ingenious abstract reasoning on man will not show him what sort of being he is, if he be not taught to know it within himself. He must seek it in the depths of his own mind, and compare what he finds there with the unerring law of God. The facts he might deduce, and the experiments he might make from the study of both in conjunction, would teach him either to confirm or correct his theory; his experience, if it did not establish, would overturn his speculations, and he would begin to build on new ground.

May we not be allowed, with all tenderness and respect, not with the arrogance of any superiority, but such as is the inevitable fruit of long observation, to suggest a few of the many remedies against the evil we have been regretting? The true preliminary to vital religion is to feel and acknowledge our lapsed humanity. There is no entrance into the temple of Christianity but through this lowly vestibule. All the dissertations of the most profound philosophers on the reasonableness and beauty of our religion, on its excellence and superiority, are but a fruitless exercise of ingenuity and eloquence, if they exclude this fundamental truth. The ablest writer, if he does not feel this conviction in his own heart, will never carry it to yours. But if you have once got over this hard and humbling introduction, the same divine guide who has given this initiatory opening, will, to the patient and persevering inquirer, perfect the work he has so happily begun. While he who turns over the page of his own vir-

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tues, and ransacks the catalogue of his good actions, will find that, under the pretence of seeking consolation, he is evading instruction; he is only heaping up materials for building confidence in himself—"by that sin fell the angels"—and may be in little less danger than the flagitious offender. Our Lord has decided on this momentous question, by his preference of the self-abasing penitent who had nothing to ask but mercy, to him who had nothing to request but praise; of the lowly confessor of his offences to the pompous recounter of his virtues; whose prayer, if self-panegyric deserves that name, plainly declared that he already possessed so much, that there was nothing left for him to ask. Our Savior took this occasion to let us see that he is better pleased when we show him our wants, than our merits.

As you do not live in the practice or the allowance of vices, which make it your interest to wish that Christianity may be false, and as you believe its external evidences, endeavor to gain also an internal conviction that it is true. Examine also into the principle of your best actions. Even some who have made a more considerable proficiency are too apt to defer examining into the motive, till they have concluded the act which the motive should have determined; they then, as it were, make up the motive to the act, and bring about the accordance in a way to quiet their own minds. Perhaps interest is acting on an opinion which we fancied that wisdom had suggested. If it succeed, we compliment ourselves on the event; if it fail, we applaud ourselves on the assigned, because we are not quite sure of the real motive.

The way to make a progress in piety and peace, is not to be too tender of our present feelings; is nobly to make some sacrifice of immediate ease, for the sake of acquiring future happiness. Desire not opiates, seek not anodynes, when your internal constitution requires stimulants. Cease to conceive of religion as a stationary thing; be assured, that to be available, it must be progressive. Read the Scriptures, not as a form, but as God's great appointed means, of infusing into your heart that life-giving principle which is the spring of all right practice. Cultivate every virtue, but rest not in any. Do every thing to deserve the esteem of men, but make not that esteem your governing principle. Value not most those qualities which are the most popular. Correct your worldly wisdom with "the wisdom which is from above." Bear in your recollection, that, to minds of a soft and yielding cast, the world is a more formidable enemy than those two other rival tempters which the New Testament commonly associates

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with it, and which would not, generally, have made a third in such corrupt company, if its dangers had not borne some proportion to theirs. It is the more necessary to press this point, as the mischiefs of the world are felt without being suspected. The other two spiritual enemies seize on the more corrupt; but the better disposed are the unconscious victims of the world, which frequently betrays its votary into the hands of its two confederates. People are inclined to be pleased with themselves when the world flatters them; they make the world their supreme arbiter; they are unwilling to appeal from so lenient a judge; and, being satisfied with themselves when its verdict is in their favor, the applause of others too often, by confirming their own, supersedes an inquiry into their real state.

The unconfirmed Christian should attend to his conduct just in those points which, though dishonest, are not dishonorable; points in which, though religion will be against him, the approbation of the world will bear him out. He would not do a disreputable thing, but should a temptation arise where his reputation is safe, there his trial commences, there he must guard himself with augmented vigilance.

The more enlightened the conscience becomes, the more we shall discover the unspeakable holiness of God. But our perceptions being cleared, and our spiritual discernment rendered more acute, this must not lead us to fancy that we are worse than when we thought so well of ourselves. We are not worse, because the growing light of divine truth reveals faults unobserved before to our view, or enlarges those we thought insignificant. Light does not create impurities, it only discloses them. Moreover, this efficient spirit does not illuminate without correcting; it is not only given for reproof, but amendment; not only for amendment, but consolation. Our unhappiness does not consist in that contrition which grows out of our new acquaintance with our own hearts. The true misery consisted in the blindness, presumption, and self-sufficiency, which our ignorance of ourselves generated. Our true felicity begins in our being brought, however severe be the means, to renounce our self-confidence, and cast ourselves entirely upon God.

It will be a good test of the improving state of a person of the above description, when he can patiently, though not at first pleasantly, persevere in the perusal of works which do not flatter his security; nay, to persevere the more earnestly, because the perusal discovers his own character to himself. When once he is brought to endure these salutary probings,

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he will soon be brought to court the hand that probes. He will begin to disrelish the vapid civility with which the superficial examiner treats human nature. Nay, he may now safely meditate on the *dignity* of man, which, in his former state, so far misled him. He will find that, in another sense, the doctrine is true. Man was indeed originally a dignified creature, for he was made in the image of the perfect God. Even now, though his will is depraved, yet he has noble intellectual faculties, which give some notion of what he was. His heart is alienated, but his understanding approves the rectitude which his will rejects. He has still recoverable powers; he is still capable, when divine truth shall have made its full impression on his soul, of that renovation which shall restore him to the dignity he has lost, reinstate him in the favor he has forfeited, and raise him infinitely higher than the elevation from which he has fallen.

To those who attempt to relieve his temporary distress by directing his eyes to his own virtues, and to the approbation those virtues are certain to obtain from heaven, he will reply with the illustrious sufferer of old, "Miserable comforters are ye all!" Slight remedies will no longer satisfy him. The more deep his views become, the less he will be disposed to claim his share in the compliments lavished on the natural human character.

But oh! what unspeakable consolation will the humble believer derive from the appellation by which the divine spirit is designated—The Comforter. There is something sublimely merciful in a dispensation, of which the term is so delightfully expressive of the thing. We read in Scripture of *grieving* the Holy Spirit; but, when we consider him under this most soothing character, is there not something of peculiar and heinous ingratitude in *grieving the Comforter?*

To endeavor to obtain a more lively belief in the existence, and earnestly to implore the aid of this quickening spirit, would be a great means of improving the character. That the doctrine of spiritual influence is a practical doctrine, is clearly deducible from the command, arising out of the conviction that the truth was already received, "If ye *live* in the spirit, *walk* in the spirit." Observe that we press you only on your own principles; we recommend you only to act upon the creed you avow. If we suggest to your adoption any thing further than the Bible enjoins, we are guilty of fanaticism, and you should be on your guard against it. We venture not to say what name is due to those who would depress your views greatly below either.

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In perusing the Scriptures, might you not commune with your own heart in something like the following language:—"This book is not a work of fancy. I do not, therefore, read it for amusement, but instruction; but am I seriously proposing to read it like one who has a deep interest in its contents? Is it my sincere intention to convert the knowledge I am about to acquire into any practical application to my own case? Is it my earnest wish to improve the state of my own heart by comparing it with what I allow to be the only perfect rule of faith and practice? Do I only read to get over my morning's task, the omission of which would make me uneasy, merely to fasten a series of facts on my memory? or do I really desire to make the great truths of the incarnation of the Son of God, of the gift of the Holy Spirit, the necessity of a living faith, a sound repentance, an entire conviction that, of myself, I can do nothing, not merely a speculative system to be recognised at church, but to be transfused into the life? Do I adopt religion as an hereditary, national profession, necessary to my credit, or as a thing in which I have a momentous personal interest? Do I propose to apply what I read to the pulling down those high imaginations, and that false security of which my Bible shows me the danger, and which its doctrines are calculated to subdue? Do I labor after the attainment of those heavenly dispositions, the exhibition of which I have been admiring? Have these vivid declarations of the unsatisfactoriness of the world at all cooled my ardor for its enjoyments? Shall I read here this holy contempt for the littleness of its pursuits, this display of its fallacies and deceits, and yet return this very evening to the participation of diversions, the exposure of whose emptiness I have been approving? Shall I extol the writer who strips off its painted mask from the world, and yet act as if the morning lecture had brought no such discovery? Nay, perhaps, it may be one of my subjects of conversation to recommend a book, of whose little efficacy in my own case I am giving a practical example.

"Do I not periodically pray, 'Make me to be numbered with thy saints in glory everlasting,' and yet am I not as shy of the society of those who are distinguished for more than common sanctity, as if it carried contamination with it? And does not the very term convey to my mind a discreditable idea, compounded of fanaticism and hypocrisy?

"After all, I may have been wrong. If respectability were security, the young ruler in the gospel had been in no danger, for his attainments were above the ordinary standard, and his

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credit was probably high. It is time to come to something like certainty; to inquire, whether I do cordially believe what I should be ashamed not to profess; whether my religion lives in my memory or my heart, on my lips or in my life, in my profession or my practice. It is time to examine, whether I have much more distinct evidences of divine truth than those who do not acknowledge the gospel to be a revelation from heaven; to inquire, why, if my understanding be somewhat more enlightened, such illumination is not more perceptible on my heart. 'Why the fruits of the Spirit,' so far from 'abounding' in me, scarcely appear, if those fruits are indeed 'love, peace, and joy in believing.'"

Let not the fear of labor, or the dread of pain, prevent you from endeavoring to obtain a clear view of your state. Let not a pusillanimous apprehension of reproach or ridicule prevent your following up your convictions. There is not any thing that is unreasonable, much less any thing that is impossible, required: no degree of zeal, or measure of earnestness, but what you see every day exerted in a worse cause. Take your measure from the world, not in *what* you shall pursue, but in the energy with which you shall urge the pursuit. Only devote to religion as much time as the worldly devote to dissipation; only set your affections on heaven as intensely as theirs are set upon earth, and all will be well: or take your measure from your former self; take at least as much pains to secure your eternal interests as you have formerly taken to acquire a language or an art. Read the word of inspiration with the same assiduity with which you have studied a favorite classic; strive with as much energy to acquire a thorough insight into the corruptions of your heart, and the remedy proposed for their cure, as you have exerted in studying the principles of your profession, or the mysteries of your calling. Inspect your consciences as accurately as your expenses; be as frugal of your time as of your fortune, and as careful of your soul as of your credit. Be neither terrified by terms, nor governed by them.

In reading those heart-searching writers, whose principles are drawn from the source of all truth, and who are only to be trusted as they are analogous to it, be not offended with some strong expressions. They expressed forcibly what they felt powerfully. The revolting term of *sinner*, which has, perhaps, made you throw aside the book, as thinking it addressed only to the perpetrators of great crimes, as fitter language for the prisons and the hulks than for the polished and the pleasing, is addressed to every one, however profound

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his knowledge, however decent his life, however amiable his manners, who lives without habitual reference to God. Be more than honest, be courageous; boldly apply it to yourself. Though your character is unstained with any disgraceful vice, though you regularly fulfil many relative duties, yet if you are destitute of the prime duty, the love of God in Christ Jesus, you stand in need of such a forcible address as we have been supposing. The discovery will be no dishonor. The dishonor consists in not feeling your state, in not struggling against it; in not applying with humble fervor for assistance to the Fountain of grace and mercy.

Take comfort that you have great advantages over many others. You have few bad habits to retract; you have no scandalous vices to combat; you have already with certain persons acquired a degree of influence by your good qualities; with others, you have acquired it by your very defects; and, as you are not suspected of enthusiasm, your usefulness will not be impeded by having that suspicion to repel. You will continue to do, in many respects, the same things which you did before. The exterior of your life may be in many points nearly the same. But, even the same actions will be done in another spirit and to another end. Religion will not convert you into misanthropes, insensible to all the dear affections which make life pleasant. It does not wish to send you with the hermits of old to the deserts of Thebais, it only wishes you to adorn the doctrine of God our Savior in your own families, and among your own connections. Not one of the proper forms and harmless habits of polished society will be impaired; they will be rather improved by this mutation of the mind. Christian humility will be aiding all the best purposes of good-breeding, while it will furnish a higher principle for its exercise. You may express this change in your character by what name you please, so that the change be but effected. It is not what you are called, but what you are, which will make the specific distinction between the character you adopt and that which you have quitted. You read the Bible now, but between reading it mechanically and spiritually there is as much difference as between pouring a fluid on the ground and distilling it. The one "cannot be gathered up" afterwards; from the other we extract, drop by drop, a precious and powerful essence.

Search, then, diligently, the word of eternal life, enriched and ennobled as it is with the chain and the accomplishment of its prophecies, with the splendor of its miracles; with the attestation of its martyrs, the consistency of its doctrines; the

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importance of its facts; the plenitude of its precepts; the treasury of its promises; the irradiations of the spirit; the abundance of its consolations; the peace it bestows; the blessedness it announces; the proportion of its parts; the symmetry of the whole: altogether presenting such a fund of instruction to the mind, of light to the path, of document to the conduct, of satisfaction to the heart, as demonstrably prove it to be the instrument of God for the salvation of man.

CHAP. XIX.

On Habits.

HABITS are those powers of the mind which arise from a collection, or rather a successive course, of ordinary actions. As they are formed by a concatenation of those actions, so they may be weakened by frequent and allowed interruptions; and if many contiguous links are wilfully broken, the habits themselves are in danger of being totally demolished.

If we may be allowed to change the metaphor, we would observe that good habits produce a sound healthy constitution of mind; they are tonics which gradually, but infallibly, invigorate the intellectual man. A silent course of habits is a part of our character, or rather conduct, which in a great measure depends on industry and application; on self-denial and watchfulness; on diligence in establishing right pursuits, and vigilance in checking such as are pernicious. Habit being an engine put into our hands for the noblest and most beneficial purposes; and being one, which, having the free command of our own faculties, we have a power to use and direct—a power, indeed, derived from God, as all our other possessions are—yet having this power, it rests with ourselves whether we shall improve it by a vigorous exertion in a right bent, or whether we shall turn it against our Maker, and direct the course of our conduct to the offending, instead of pleasing God.

Habits are not so frequently formed by vehement incidental efforts on a few great occasions, as by a calm and steady perseverance in the ordinary course of duty. If this were uniformly followed up, we should be spared that occasional violence to our feelings, that agitating resistance, which, by wasting the spirits, leads more feeble minds to dread the recurrence of the same necessity which induces a painful

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feeling, the consequence of negligence, even where there is real rectitude of heart; while the regular adoption of right habits, indented by repetition, establishes such a tranquillity of spirit, as contributes to promote happiness no less than virtue. The mind, like the body, gains robustness and activity by the habitual exercise of its powers. Occasional right actions may be caprice, may be vanity, may be impulse, but hardly deserve the name of virtue, till they proceed from a principle which habit has moulded into a frame; then the right principle which first set them at work continues to keep them at it, and finally becomes so prevalent, that there is a kind of spontaneity in the act, which keeps up the energy, without constant sensible reference to the spring which first set it in motion. Good habits are good dispositions ripened by repetition into virtue, and sanctified by prayer into holiness. If we allow that vicious habits persisted in lay us more and more open to the dominion of our spiritual adversary, can we doubt that virtuous habits acquire proportional strength from the superinduced aid of the spirit of God?

The more uniform is our conformity to the rules of virtue and purity, the less we may require to be reminded of the particular influence of the motive. We need not, nor indeed can we, recur every moment to the exact source of the action; its flowing from an habitual sense of duty will generally explain the ground on which it is performed. If the heart is kept awake and alive in a cheerful obedience to God, the immediate motive of the immediate act is not likely to be a bad one. Many actions, indeed, require to be deliberated on, and whatever requires deliberation before we do it, demands scrutiny why we do it. This will lead to such an inquest into our motive as, if there be any want of sincerity in it, will tend to its detection.

Notwithstanding what has been urged above as to the exercise of constant assiduity in preference to mere occasional exertion, we would be understood to offer this counsel rather to the proficient than to the novice. As the beginnings are always difficult, especially to ardent spirits, such spirits would do well, particularly at their entrance on a more correct course, to select for themselves some single task of painful exertion, which, by bringing their mental vigor into full play, shall afford them so sensible an evidence of the conquest they have obtained, as will more than repay the labor of the conflict. A friend of the author was so fully aware of the importance of thus taming an impatient temper, that she imposed upon herself the habit of beginning even any ordinary under-

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taking with the most difficult part of it, instead of following the usual method of proceeding from the lower to the higher. If a language was to be learnt, she began with a very difficult author. If a scheme of economy was to be improved, she relinquished at once some prominent indulgence; if a vanity was to be cut off, she fixed on some strong act of self-denial which should appear a little disreputable to others, while it somewhat mortified herself. These incipient trials once got over, she had a large reward in finding all lesser ones in the same class comparatively light. The main victory was gained in the onset, the subsequent skirmishes cost little.

If it be said that the effort is too violent, the change too sudden, we apprehend the assertion is a mistake. When we have worked up ourselves, or rather are worked up by a superior agency to a strong measure, it becomes a point of honor, as well as of duty, to persist; we are ashamed of stopping short, and especially of retreating, though we have no witness but God and our own hearts. Having once persevered, the victory is the reward. A slower change, though desirable, has less stimulus, less animation, is less sensibly marked; we cannot recur, as in the other case, to the hour of conquest, nor have we so clear a consciousness of having obtained it.

But the conquest we have won we must maintain. The fruits of the initiatory victory may be lost, if vigilance does not guard that which valor subdued. If the relinquishment of evil habits is so difficult, it is not less necessary to be watchful, lest we should insensibly slide into the negligence of such as are good. What we neglect, we gradually forget. This guard against declension is the more requisite, as the human mind is so limited, that one object quickly expels another. A new idea takes possession as soon as its predecessor is driven out; and the very traces of former habits are effaced, not suddenly, but progressively; no two successive ideas being, perhaps, very dissimilar, while the last in the train will be of a character quite different, not from that which immediately preceded, but from that which first began to draw us off from the right habit; the impression continues to grow fainter, till that which at first was weakened, is at length obliterated.

If we do not establish the habit of the great statesman of Holland, to do only one thing at a time, we shall do nothing well; the whole of our understanding, however highly we may rate it, is not too much to give to any subject which is of sufficient importance to require investigation at all; car-

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tainly is not great enough to afford being split into as many parts, as we may choose to take subjects simultaneously in hand. If we allow the different topics which require deliberation to break in on each other; if a second is admitted to a conference before we have dismissed the first, as neither will be distinctly considered, so neither is likely to obtain a just decision. These desultory pursuits obstruct the establishment of correct habits.

But it requires the firm union of a sound principle with an impartial judgment to ascertain that the habit is really good, or the mischief will be great in proportion to the pertinacity. For who can conceive a more miserable state, than for a man to be goaded on by a long perseverance in habits, which both his conscience and his understanding condemn? Even if upon conviction he renounces them, he has a long time to spend in backing, with the mortification at last, to find himself only where he ought to have been at setting out.

Without insisting on the difficulty of totally subduing long-indulged habits of any gross vice, such as intemperance, we may remark, that it requires a long and painful process, —and this even after a man is convinced of its turpitude, after he discovers evident marks of improvement—to conquer the habits of any fault, which, though not so scandalous in the eyes of the world, may be equally inconsistent with real piety. Take the love of money, for instance. How reluctantly, if at all, is covetousness extirpated from the heart where it has long been rooted! The imperfect convert has a conviction on his mind, nay, he has a feeling in his heart, that there is no such thing as being a Christian without liberality. This he adopts, in common with other just sentiments, and speaks of it as a necessary evidence of sincerity. He has gotten the whole Christian theory by heart, and such parts of it as do not trench upon this long-indulged corruption, he more or less brings into action. But in this tender point, though the profession is cheap, the practice is costly. An occasion is brought home to him of exercising the grace he has been commending. He acknowledges its force, he does more, he feels it. If taken at the moment, something considerable might be done; but if any delay intervene, that delay is fatal; for from feeling, he begins to calculate. Now there is a cooling property in calculation, which freezes the warm current that sensibility had set in motion. The old habit is too powerful for the young convert, yet he flatters himself that he has at once exercised charity and discretion. He takes comfort both from the liberal feeling which had resolved to

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give the money, and the prudence which had saved it, laying to his heart the flattering unction, that he has only spared it for some more pressing demand, which, when it occurs, will again set him on feeling, and calculating, and saving.

Some well-meaning persons unintentionally confirm this kind of error. They are so zealous on the subject of sudden conversion, that they are too ready to pronounce, from certain warm expressions, that this change has taken place in their acquaintance, while evident symptoms of an unchanged nature continue to disfigure the character. They do not always wait till an alteration in the habits has given that best evidence of an interior alteration. They dwell so exclusively on miraculous changes, that they leave little to do for the convert, but to consider himself as an inactive recipient of grace; not as one who is to exhibit, by the change in his life, that mutation which the divine spirit has produced on his heart. This too common error appears to arise, not only from enthusiasm, but partly from want of insight into the human character, of which habits are the groundwork, and in which right habits are not less the effect of grace for being gradually produced. We cannot, indeed, purify ourselves, any more than we can convert ourselves, it being equally the work of the Holy Spirit to infuse purity, as well as the other graces, into the heart: but it rests with us to exercise this grace, to reduce this purity to a habit, else the Scriptures would not have been so abundant in injunctions to this duty.

"We must hate sin," says bishop Jeremy Taylor, "in all its dimensions, in all its distances, and in every angle of its reception." St. Paul felt this scrupulousness of Christian delicacy to such an extent, that, in intimating the commission of certain enormities to the church of Ephesus, he charged that *they should not be so much as named among them.* This great master in the science of human nature, a knowledge perfected by grace, was aware that the very mention of some sins might be a temptation to commit them; he would not have the mind intimate with the thought, nor the imagination in contact with the expression, nor the tongue familiar with the sound. He who knew all the minuter entrances, as well as the broader avenues to the corrupt heart of man, knew how much safer it is to avoid than to combat, how much easier is retreat than victory. He was aware, that purity of heart and thought could alone produce purity of life and conduct.

From the unhappy want of this early habit of restraint, many, who are become sincerely pious, find it very difficult

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to extricate their minds from certain associations established by former habits. Corrupt books and evil communications have at once left a sense of abhorrence on their hearts, with an indelible impression on their memory. They find it almost impossible to get rid of sallies of imagination, which, though they once admired as wit, they now consider as little less than blasphemy. The will rejects them; but they cling to the recollection with fatal pertinacity. Vices, not only of the conduct, but of the imagination, long indulged, leave a train of almost inextinguishable corruptions behind them. These are evils, of which even the reformed heart does not easily get clear. He who repents suddenly, will too often be purified slowly. A corrupt practice may be abolished, but a soiled imagination is not easily cleansed.

We repeat, that these rooted habits, even after the act has been long hated and discontinued, may persist in tormenting him who has long repented of the sin, so as to keep him to the last in a painful and distressing doubt as to his real state; but if this doubt continue to make him more vigilant, and to keep alive his humility, the uneasiness it causes may be more salutary than a greater confidence of his own condition. Many have complained, after years of sincere reformation, that they did not possess that peace and consolation which religion promises; not suspecting, that their long adherence to wrong habits may naturally darken their views and cloud their enjoyments. Surely the man whose mind has abandoned itself for years to improper indulgences has little right to complain, if bitterness accompany his repentance, if dejection break in on his peace. Surely he has little right to murmur, if those consolations are refused to him, which, in the inscrutable wisdom of Providence, are sometimes withheld from good men, who have never been guilty of his irregularities in conduct, who have never indulged his disorders of heart and mind. When we see holy men, to whom this cheerful confidence is sometimes denied, or from whom, in the agonies of dissolving nature, it is withdrawn, shall they whose case we have been considering, complain if theirs are not all halcyon days, if their closing hour is rather contrite than triumphant? But this, if it be not a state of joy, may be equally a state of safety.

The duty of keeping up this sense of purity is of great extent. One of the many uses of prayer is, that, by the habit of breathing out our inmost thoughts to God, the sense of his being, the consciousness of his presence, the idea that his pure eye is immediately upon us, imparts a temporary purity

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to the soul, which it vainly aims to maintain in an equal degree in its intercourse with mankind. The beatitude of the promised vision of God is more immediately annexed to this grace: and it is elsewhere said, "that every one who hath this hope, purifieth himself, as He is pure." The holy felicity of the creature is thus made to depend on its assimilation with the Creator. There is a beautiful intimation of the purity of God in the order of construction in the prayer taught by our Savior. We pray that *his name may be hallowed*, that is, that our hearts, and the hearts of all men, may honor his holy name; may be deeply impressed with a sense of his purity and holiness, before we proceed to the subsequent petitions. We thus invest our minds with this preparatory sentiment, in order to sanctify what we are about to implore. In addition to the necessity of stated prayer for the promotion of purity, it may be observed, that if, by habitual devotion, we bend our thoughts into that course, they will in time almost voluntarily pursue it. The good effect of prayer will, on our return to society, be much increased by the practice of occasionally darting up to Heaven a short ejaculation, a laudatory sentence, or some brief spontaneous effusion. This will assist to stir up the flame which was kindled by the morning sacrifice, and preserve it from total extinction before that of the evening be offered up. We may learn from the profane practice of some, that an ejaculation takes as little time, and obtrudes less on notice, that an oath or an exclamation. It implores, in a few words, the same divine power for a blessing, whom the other obtests for destruction.

One great benefit of science is allowed to be derived from its habituating the mind to shake off its dependence upon sense. Devout meditation, in like manner, accustoms it not to fly for support to sensible and material things, but to rest in such as are intellectual and spiritual. By a general neglect of serious thinking, virtue is sometimes withered and decayed; in minds where it is not torn up by the roots, there remains in them that vital sap which may, still, upon habitual cultivation, not only vegetate, but produce fruit.

One great obstacle to habitual meditation must not be passed over. It is the pernicious custom of submitting to the uncontrolled dominion of a roving imagination. This prolific faculty produces such a constant budding of images, fancies, visions, conjectures, and conceits, that she can subsist plentifully on her own independent stock. She is perpetually wandering from the point to which she promised to confine herself when she set out; is ever roaming from the spot to

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which her powerless possessor had threatened to pin her down. We retire with a resolution to reflect; reason has no sooner marshalled her forces, than this undisciplined runaway escapes from duty, one straggler after another joins the enemy, or brings home some foreign impertinence. While we meant to indulge only a harmless reflection, we are brought under subjection to a whole series of reveries of different characters and opposite descriptions. Fresh trains obliterate our first speculations, till the spirit sinks into a sort of deliquium. We have nothing for it, but resolutely to resist the enfeebling despot. Let us stir up some counteracting force: let us fly to some active employment which shall break the charm, and dissolve the pleasant thraldom. No matter what, so it be innocent and opposite. We shall not cure ourselves by the sturdiest resolution not to do this thing which is complained of, unless we compel ourselves to do something else. Courageous exertion is the only conqueror of irresolution: vigorous action the only supplanter of idle speculation.

Habits are not arbitrary systems and predetermined schemes. They are not always laid down deliberately as plans to be pursued, but steal upon us insensibly; insinuate themselves into a train of successive repetitions, till we find ourselves in bondage to them, before we are aware they have gotten any fast hold over us. But if rooted bad habits are of such difficult extirpation, that, as we have already observed, they not only destroy the peace of him who continues them, but embitter the very penitence of him who has forsaken them, there is a class of beings in whom they are not yet inveterate. If I could speak with the tongues of men and of angels, never could they be employed to a more important purpose, than in representing to my youthful readers the blessedness of avoiding such habits now, as may take a whole life to unlearn.

O you to whom opening life is fresh, and gay, and tempting! you who have yet your path to choose, whose hearts are ingenuous, and whose manners amiable, in whom, if wrong propensities discover themselves, yet evil habits are not substantially formed—could you be made sensible, at a less costly price than your own experience, that though, through the mercy of God, the long-erring heart may hereafter be brought to abhor its own sin, yet the once initiated mind can never be made to unknow its knowledge, nor to unthink its thoughts; can never be brought to separate those combinations which it once too fondly cherished:—how much future regret, how

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much incurable sorrow might you spare yourselves! If you would but reflect that though, in respect of the past, you may become inwardly penitent, you cannot become, as you now are, outwardly innocent, and that no repentance can restore your present happy ignorance of practised evil,—you would then keep clear of a bondage from which you perceive the older and the wiser do not, because they cannot, commonly emancipate themselves.

But, supposing a young man is so happy as to escape the grosser corruptions, yet, if he have a turn to wit and ridicule he should be singularly on his guard against the false credit which ludicrous associations will obtain for him in certain societies. An indelicate but pointed jest, a combination of some light thought with some scriptural expression, a parody which makes a serious thing ridiculous, or a sober one absurd,—these are instruments by no means harmless, not only to him who handles them, but also in the hands of subalterns and copyists, who, having, perhaps, no faculty but memory, and seldom using memory but for mischief, retain with joy, and circulate from vanity, what was at first uttered with mere random thoughtlessness. Profane dunces are the busy echoes of the loose wit of others. With little talent for original mischief, but devoting that little to the worst purposes, they pick up a kind of literary livelihood on the stray sarcasms and fugitive bon-mots of others, and are maintained on what the witty throw away. If even in the first instance there were nothing wrong in the thing itself, there is mischief in the connection. Whatever serves to append a light thought to a serious one, is unsafe: both have, by frequent citation, been so accustomed to appear together, that when, in a better frame of mind, the good one is called up, the corrupt associate never fails to present itself unbidden, and, like Pharaoh's blasted corn, devours the wholesome ear.

"Man," says one of the most sagacious observers of man, Dr. Paley, "is a bundle of habits." The more we attend to them, the more distinctly we shall perceive those which are right, and the more dexterity we shall acquire in establishing them. In setting out in our moral course, we can make little progress, unless we suffer ourselves to be governed by certain rules; but when the rules are once worked into habits, they in a manner govern *us*. We lose the sense of that restraining power which was at first unpleasant though self-imposed.

To illustrate this by an instance:—The accomplished orator is not fettered by recurring to the laws of the grammarian, nor the canons of the dialectician, though it was by being

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habitually trained in their respective schools that he acquired both his accuracy and argument. Yet, while he is speaking, it never occurs to him, that there are such things in the world as grammar or logic. The rules are become habits, they have answered their end, and are dismissed.

If we consider the force of habit on amusements:—stated diversions enslave us more by the custom of making us feel the want of them, than by any positive pleasure they afford. By being incessantly pursued, they diminish in their power of delighting; yet such is the plastic power of habit, and such the yielding substance of our minds, that they become arbitrary wants, absolute articles, not of luxury, but necessity. Strange! that what is enjoyed without pleasure cannot be discontinued without pain! The very hour when, the place where, the sight of those with whom they have been partaken, present associations which we feel a kind of difficulty and uneasiness in separating. We are partly cheated into this imaginary necessity by seeing the eagerness with which others pursue them. Yet if it were not an artificial necessity, a want not arising from the constitution of our nature, those would be unhappy who are deprived of them, or rather, who never enjoyed them. There is a respectable society of Christians among us who carry the restriction of diversions to the widest extent. Yet among the number of amiable, virtuous, and well-instructed young Quakers whom I have known, I have always found them as cheerful and as happy as other people. Their cheerfulness was perhaps more intellectual than mirthful; but their happiness never appeared to be impeded by complaints at the privation of pleasures to which habit had not enslaved them—a habit which, when carried too far, destroys the very end of pleasure, that of invigorating the mind by relaxing it.

It is a proof that the apostle considered conversion in general a gradual transformation, when he spoke of the renewing of the inward man *day by day;* this seems to intimate that good habits, under the influence of the Spirit of God, are continually advancing the growth of the Christian, and conducting him to that maturity which is his consummation and reward. The grace of repentance, like every other, must be established by habit. Repentance is not completed by a single act; it must be incorporated into our mind, till it become a fixed state, arising from a continual sense of our need of it. *Forgive us our trespasses* would never have been enjoined as a daily petition, if daily repentance had not been necessary for daily sins. The grand work of repentance,

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indeed, accompanies the change of heart; but that which is purified will not, in this state of imperfection, necessarily remain pure. While we are liable to sin, we must be habitually penitent.

A man may give evidence of his possessing many amiable qualities, without our being able to say, therefore, he is a good man. His virtues may be constitutional, their motives may be worldly. But when he exhibits clear and convincing evidence that he has subdued all his inveterate bad habits, weeded out rooted evil propensities; when the miser is grown largely liberal, the passionate become meek, the calumniator charitable, the malignant kind; when every bad habit is not only eradicated, but succeeded by its opposite quality, we would conclude that such a change could only be effected by power from on high—we would not scruple to call that man religious. But, above all, there must be a change wrought in the secret course of our thoughts; without this interior improvement the abandonment of any wrong practice is no proof of an effectual alteration. This, indeed, we cannot make a rule by which to judge others, but it is an infallible one by which to judge ourselves. Certain faults are the effect of certain temptations, rather than of that common depravity natural to all. But a general rectification of thought, a sensible revolution in the secret desires and imaginations of the heart, is perhaps the least equivocal of all the changes effected in us. This is not merely the cure of a particular disease, but the infusion of a sound principle of life and health, the general feeling of a renovated nature, the evidence of a new state of constitution.

Candid Christians, however, who know experimentally the power of habit, who are aware of the remainders of evil in the best men, will not rashly pronounce that he who, while he is struggling with some long-cherished corruption, falls into an occasional aberration from the path he is endeavoring to follow, is therefore not religious.

If our bad habits have arisen from dangerous associations, we must dissolve the intercourse, if we would obviate the danger. Good impressions may have been made on the heart, yet the indulged thought, and especially the allowed sight of that object which once melted down our better resolutions, may melt them again. If we would conquer an invading enemy, we must not only fight him in the field, but cut off his provisions. It may be difficult, but nothing should repel the effort but what is impossible. Now in this there is no impossibility, because the thing not being placed out of our

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reach, there needs only the concurrence of the will. If we humor this wayward will, it is at our peril. What we persist in indulging, we shall every day find more difficult to restrain. Perhaps on our not resisting the very next temptation, will depend the future color of our life—the very possibility of future resistance. That which is now in our power, may, by repeated rejection, be judicially placed beyond it. Infirmity of purpose produces perpetual relapses. Temptation strengthens as resistance weakens. We create, by criminal indulgences, an imbecility in the will, and then plead the weakness, not which we found, but made. Half measures produce more pain and no success. They are compounded of desire and regret, of appetite and fear, of indulgence and remorse. While we are balancing, conditioning, temporizing, negotiating with conscience, we might be singing Te Deum for the victory.

What force we take from the will by every repetition, we give to the habit. A faint endeavor ends in a sure defeat. Temptation becoming more importunate, if its incursions are not resisted, if its attacks are not repelled, the habit will get final possession of the mind; encouragement will invite repetition; where it has been once entertained, it will find a ready way; where it has been received with familiarity, expulsion will soon become difficult, and afterwards impossible. The Holy Spirit, whose aid perhaps we have faintly invoked, and firmly rejected, is withdrawn. But if we are sincere in the invocation, we shall be firm in the resistance; if we are fervent in the resolution, we shall be triumphant in the conflict.

What we have insisted on is the more important, because all progressive goodness consists in habits; and virtuous habits, begun and carried on here with increasing improvement and multiplied energies, are susceptible of eternal proficiency. When we are assured that the effect of habits will not cease with life, but be carried into eternity, it gives such an enlargement to the ideas, such an expansion to the soul, that it seems as if every hour were lost in which we are not beginning or improving some virtuous habit.

As we were originally made in the image of God, so shall we, by the renovation of our minds, of which our improved habits is the best test, be restored, in an enlargement of our moral powers, to a nearer resemblance of him. Were it not that there is a participation, in all rational minds, of the same qualities in kind, though infinitely different in degree, the perfections of God would not so repeatedly be held out in

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Scripture as objects of our imitation. It would have been absurd to have said, "as he that hath called you is holy, so be ye holy." "Be ye holy, for I am holy," would not have been a reasonable command, unless holiness and purity had been one common moral quality of the nature, though unspeakably distant in the proportion between that perfect Being from whom whatever is good is derived, and the imperfect creature who derives it. Surely it is not too much to say, that though we can only attain that low measure of which our weak and sinful nature is capable, yet still to aim at imitating those perfections, is a desire natural to the renewed heart: and it may be considered as a symptom that no such renovation has taken place, when no such desire is felt.

How could we attempt to trace the perfections of the divine nature, if he had not stamped on our mind some idea of those perfections? We may bring these notions practically home to our own bosoms, possessing, as we do, not only natural ideas of the divine rectitude, but having these notions highly rectified, and confirmed by the Scripture representation of God; if, instead of adopting abstract reason for a rule of judging, which is often too unsubstantial for our grasp, we set ourselves to consider what such a perfect Being is likely to approve, or condemn, in human conduct, and then, comparing not only our deductions, but our practice, with the gospel, adopt or reject what that approves or condemns.

CHAP. XX.

On the Inconsistency of Christians with Christianity.

We have, in three former chapters,* ventured to address a class of Christians whose lives are decorous, and whose manners are amiable; but who, from the want of having imbibed the vital spirit of Christianity, and having, therefore, formed their principles on imperfect models, seem to have fallen short of that excellence of which their characters are susceptible.

We presume now to address a very different class; persons acknowledging, indeed, the great truths of Christianity, but living either in the neglect of the principles they profess, or in practical opposition to the theory they maintain; yielding to the tyranny of passion or of pleasure, governed by the

* An Inquiry why some good sort of People are not better.

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appetite or the caprice of the moment, and going on in a careless inattention to the duties inculcated by an authority they recognise. The lives of the persons previously considered are commonly better than their profession, the lives of those now under contemplation are worse. These seem to have more faults, the other more prejudices. The others are satisfied to be stationary; these are not aware that they are retrograde. The former are in a far better state; but there is hope that the latter may find out that they are in a bad one. The one rest in their performances, with little doubt of their safety; the other, with a blind security, rest in the promises, without putting themselves in the way to profit by them.

If the whole indivisible scheme of Christianity could be split into two portions, and either half were left to the option of these classes; those formerly noticed would adopt the commandments from an assurance of being saved by their obeying them; these under present consideration would choose the creed, from a notion that its mere adoption would go near to exonerate them from personal obedience. The others intend to earn heaven by their defective works: these, overlooking the necessity of holiness, flatter themselves, when they think at all, with the cheap salvation of a mental assent. We all desire to be finally saved. There is but one opinion about the end; we only differ about the means. Many fly to the merits of the Redeemer to obtain happiness for themselves hereafter, who do not desire his spirit to govern their lives now, though he has so repeatedly declared, that he will not save us without renovating us. To suppose that we shall possess hereafter what we do not desire here, that we shall complete then what we do not think of beginning now, is among the inconsistencies of many who pass muster under the generic title of Christians.

The contest between heaven and earth seems to be reduced to one point, *which* shall possess the heart of man. The bent of our affections decides on the object of our pursuit. When they are rightly turned by his powerful hand, God has the predominance. It is the grand design of his word, of his spirit, of all his dispensations, whether providential or spiritual, to restore us to himself, to recover the heart which sin has estranged from him. Where these instruments fail, the original bias governs, and the world has the entire possession.

Prospective prudence is esteemed a mark of wisdom by the world, and he who possessed the wisdom which is from above, observes, that "the prudent man foreseeth." Here

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the Bible and the world appear at first sight to be in strict accordance; but they differ materially, both as to the distance and the object of their forecast. How prudent do we reckon that man who denies himself present expenses, and waves present enjoyments, that he may more effectually secure to himself future fortune! We observe that his discreet self-denial will be amply rewarded by the increasing means of after-indulgence. But if this very man were to extend his views still further, and look for the remuneration of his abstinence, not to a future day, but to a future life, he would not with his worldly friends advance his character for wisdom. While he looks to a distant point of time he is commended, but he forfeits the commendation if he overlooks all time, and defers the fruition of his hope till time shall be no more.

It is indeed this partial looking forward, this fixing the eye on some point of aggrandizement, or wealth, or some other distinction, which obstructs our view of the final prospect; or it is the excess of immediate gratification, the delights of sense, the blandishments of the world, which prevent us even from thinking of it. While the sensualist incloses himself in a narrow circle, beyond which his eye does not penetrate, the Christian, like the mariner, steers his course not by his sight but his compass. In any imminent distress, indeed, men almost naturally fly to their Maker. It is rather an impulse than a principle. Yet it is in prosperity that we most need his assistance. Success, which is perhaps more eminently the hour of peril, is more rarely the hour of prayer. There is an intoxication attending on prosperous fortune, especially while it is new, which diverts the spirits from communication with the Father of spirits. The slackening of devotion under success seems to imply a conviction that, prosperity being a gift of God, our prayers have been heard; we have obtained his blessing, and, having the end of our prayers granted, we insensibly lessen our endeavors to please him whom our success induces us to believe that we have already pleased. Thus, having made things even, men seem to set out on a new career; they plan new indulgences, additional projects of splendor, or of gratification; they assiduously multiply those pleasant instances of obedience which the poet has flatteringly told us we give when we "enjoy." But the object of enjoyment is not seldom the instrument of destruction. Anacreon was choked by a grape-stone.

But, if prayer to the Fountain of all Good is occasionally offered up by the negligent Christian, it is not likely to be

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heard, because it is not his own prayer. We do not mean, because it is the composition of another; that, as it does not lessen its value, does not obstruct its acceptance. If the feelings go along with the petitions, they will be heard; if the affections are bound up with the words, they will be accepted. It is not because they are forms, but because the little interest taken in them renders them mere forms. It is not because they are pre-composed, but because they are used with constraint—are repetitions, not effusions. It is using them without that condition of mind, without that cordial voluntary approach to the divine presence, to which is annexed the gracious promise of being in *no wise* cast out; of that state of mind which David suggested when he said, "My heart (not my lips) hath talked of Thee:" when, in answer to the command, "Seek ye my face," warm and instant from the heart he fervently replied, "Thy face, Lord, will I seek."

If it be objected, that we can no more pray up to scriptural expressions than we can live up to scriptural injunctions, does not the one, equally with the other, indicate the high aspiring nature of religion? Does it not remind us, that our aims must be always more lofty than the possibility of our attainments; that if the one be hitherto low and earthly, the other must be high and heavenly; bounded by no limits, restrained by no measures, but improving with our moral improvement, strengthening with our spiritual strength?

You do not deny that "the gospel is the power of God unto salvation," because it is asserted by an authority you respect. But to whom is it such a power? You reply from your memory, "To all them that believe." But of what use is a belief that is obviously uninfluential? You are unconsciously falling into the very error of the fanatic whom you so justly condemn. Like him, you value yourself upon your full assent to the truth of Christianity. You go beyond him, for you profess to have reason as well as faith on your side. But is not that an irrational faith which professes to believe that a principle is productive of salvation, and yet to rest contented while you are not governed by that principle? You bring your reason and your will into the ordinary transactions of life; the one impels, and the other guides, in almost all concerns except that one grand concern, where the impulse and the guidance are incomparably the most important. You allow, indeed, in a general way, that the thoughts and pursuits of religion are the most worthy of attention, and then act as if you held no such opinion, made no such avowal.

It is a wonderful instance of the union of justice and mercy

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in God, that in the very act of making sin the marked object of his displeasure, he makes the penitent offender the chosen object of his compassion. But revelation will afford no shelter to those who screen themselves under its promises, while they live in opposition to its laws; to those who desire to retain their vices, without relinquishing their hopes; who take refuge in the very mercy they are abusing; who think they exalt the efficacy of grace, by believing it will cancel, not only all the sins they have committed, but all they intend to commit. The truth is, if they really believe God, it is only when he promises. But shall he not also be believed when he threatens, or shall we desire him to abrogate half his word, that while we are violating one part, the other may confirm our security? Is not this subterfuge as much an abdication of common sense, as a contempt of divine justice?

Unhallowed passions too frequently enlist both wit and argument into their service; the one laughs at their excesses, the other reasons them away. Wit is no longer employed in her rightful office, to decorate virtue, but to ridicule her. Reason is no longer called in to control appetite, but to plead for it. Indulgence confirms its dominion. As the empire of sense is fortified, that of reason declines. Even God is audaciously, though, perhaps, gayly arraigned, for having made corrupt inclinations natural, and then punishing their indulgence; as if he had not given reason to restrain, as if he had not bestowed religion to control them.

It is not an uncommon practice to assent to the truth of Scripture, and even to approve and recommend it, without *really* believing it; for the test of belief is to make it the rule of judging ourselves, and endeavoring to act as if we expected to be judged by it. The Christian doctrines will always produce Christian affections and dispositions in the mind, in the proportion in which they are understood, in the degree in which they are cordially embraced. The temper and conduct of the Christian is a faithful reflection of the doctrines of Christianity; and the improvement of his life is the only evidence of his having received its truths into his heart.

Of all the ingredients of which our intellectual and spiritual character is compounded, that is the most doubtful, the most unfixed, and the most easily shaken, which is in reality the basis of all our other principles, as well as the foundation of all our future hopes—we mean faith. It is the want of this living root which accounts for all the deformities in the mind, all the anomalies in the character of man. Disguise it as we will,—and we confine not the charge to the profligate, or even

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to the negligent,—it is practical unbelief which so sadly depresses our moral standard.

Yet the negligent in practice are not seldom confident in the profession of their faith. As they are not often troubled with any doubt of themselves, of course they institute no very deep inquiry whether they do sincerely believe the promises of Christianity. But, however frivolous *they* may deem the scrutiny, it was once thought to be a matter worthy of a serious inquiry among Christians, whether their hopes were well founded. Better men than many who now reckon themselves good, entertained doubts of their own state, and could not rest till they came to something like decision on this momentous question. Is then that sober inquiry, which was in them the truest mark of prudence, now to be treated as a needless scrupulosity, if not as an evidence of an unsound mind? Are the doctrines of the gospel on which they bestowed so much thought and labor unworthy of yours? Is that which was to them so serious a concern as to demand a combination of their best faculties and their most fervent endeavors, become so easy as to be comprehended at a glance, and adopted in a moment? Are the difficulties, which cost them so much reflection, prayer, and self-denial, miraculously removed, and made smooth for you? Are things so altered, that while they worked out their salvation with fear and trembling, you are secure of an easy, indolent, almost unsolicited salvation? Are corrupt human nature and the requisitions of the gospel now so suddenly accommodated to each other? Are sin and safety grown so congruous? Is it become so natural to fallen creatures to be reconciled to God and goodness, without that long and serious process which was once thought so indispensable to its accomplishment? Is that superinduced principle which the most acute nation in the world accounted "foolishness," and the most perverse people a "stumbling-block," become to you so easy of apprehension, so accessible to your reach, so facilitated to your corruptions, so certain of attainment, as to supersede the labor of examination, as to be acquired without the trouble of pursuit? If to *you* the end is made sure, with the utter ignorance of the way, and a general neglect of the means; if *you* find that path clear which they found intricate; if *you* obtain without seeking that assurance, by the bare promise of which they were supported; if all this be really your happy case, it must have been achieved by some power which has not been before revealed, by some miracle which neither the Old or the New Testament has either recorded or predicted.

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You would do well then, besides looking back to the oracles of truth, to inquire of your authorized instructers, if there has been any change effected in the requirements of Christianity, any deductions made in its demands, any facilities introduced into its scheme, any revelation by which the old impediments have been removed, and a shorter cut to heaven cleared out? Consult some real Christians of your acquaintance; inquire if *they*, despising and forsaking the good old way, found repentance, pardon, holiness, victory over the world, and acceptance with God, so slight, so rapid, yet so certain a thing? Ask if they became Christians by chance or by inheritance, if they were "renewed in the spirit of their minds" by the mere form of baptism? Inquire if their entrance into a religious life cost them no sacrifice, if their attainments were accidental, if they maintained the ground once gained without effort, if they improved it without prayer, if they were established in it without divine assistance?

The truth is, the persons in question either do not think the defect of faith a fundamental error, or they suppose they believe when they do not. When this last is the case, they rest satisfied in their mistake; for people do not seek to extricate themselves from a doubt in which they do not feel entangled. It is, however, practical unbelief which quenches the vital flame of virtue.

Unbelief is not, as you are too ready to suppose, merely one among the many evils of the heart, but it is the root and principle of them all. That faith is the foundation of virtue is implied to have been clearly understood by the apostle when he speaks of "the *obedience* of faith."

How hotly do we resent it, if *our* veracity is suspected! How indignantly do our hearts rise, if our fellow-creatures do not believe our word on occasions the most trivial! Yet we do not tremble at the idea of not believing the word of Omnipotence: yet do his promises excite no ardent desires in our hearts after the blessings they reveal. And could this possibly be the case, if we confidently credited the truth of the promises?

If men only suspect there is some new road which may lead to fame or fortune, or any desirable acquisition, how sedulous are they in their inquiries after it, how anxious to ascertain its probability, how zealous to turn the information to their profit! But when *this* grand concern is in question, so far from investigating, they take it for granted, they assume, not only that the thing is true, but that their interest in it is safe. It scarcely costs them a thought, they are seldom

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embarrassed with a doubt. So far from reflecting how the difficulties which lie in the way may be removed, they do not inquire whether they exist, much less what they are; and with those who would point them out, they evade the subject to save the trouble. We need look no further for the solution of our indifference than that we do not earnestly desire the promised felicity because of our practical incredulity.

If an intelligent Chinese had been made acquainted with the high privileges and sublime hopes of a Christian—what advantages he possesses here, and what prospects he has in reversion, not contingent, but certain, provided he turned his advantages to the securing of his prospects; what promises had been made him from an authority he allowed, and by a veracity he trusted;—what a glorious people would he expect to find in a society of such highly privileged beings! Would he not look for cordial obedience to *his* laws in whose will they daily express a complete acquiescence?—for unbounded love and charity among creatures who periodically confessed that their own sins could not be forgiven, if they forgave not the sins of others?—for a gratitude among creatures who recognised one common redemption, which should bear some little proportion to his love by whom such an astonishing redemption had been wrought? Would he not conclude that nothing could be wanting to their happiness but an entrance on that immortality for which they must be so well prepared—nothing wanting to their perfection, but the visible presence of Him whom they acknowledge to be its source and centre? and that in the mean time they were living the life of saints preparatory to their commencing that of angels?

But when, on a personal intercourse, he observed that the lives of so many beings, the essence of whose religion is love, was a scene of strife and emulation—that this community of Christians which he thought, like the city of Jerusalem, was at unity with itself, had rather be at unity with any thing than with each other—split into parties and torn asunder by conflicting interests!—when he saw that the professors of a religion, founded in humility and self-denial, could be proud without reproach, and voluptuous without discredit; when he saw, in so many other respects, the inconceivable distance between our lives and our patterns, our hopes and our aims, would he not believe the whole had been a misrepresentation? Would he not rejoice, like a true patriot, to find that there was less difference between the inhabitants of Pekin and London than between the professor of Christianity and the

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gospel from which he took his rule? Would not this be his natural inference, either that Christianity is not true, or that its avowed disciples do not believe it? When he compared their actual indulgences with their exalted expectancies, would he not believe that their religion was founded on a proclamation for present enjoyment, and not on a promise of future blessedness? In any event, would he conceive that eternal glory was to be obtained without an effort, I had almost said without a wish?

CHAP. XXI.

Expostulation with the inconsistent Christian.

The most valuable truths, though known, are useless, if not applied. Though men were acquainted with the magnetic power of the loadstone before the Christian era, it remained an object of idle admiration, till within a very few centuries. The practical use of the needle being at length found out, its application to its true end gave mankind access to unknown regions, and opened to them a new world. If such were the application of religious knowledge to its proper end, it would, indeed, open to us a world, in which, not only one, but every adventurer, might be rewarded, not with discovery merely, but with possession.

To this unseen world God has shown us the way by his word, has smoothed that way by his grace, has promised us the direction of his Spirit; has given us free access by his Son, revealing him to us at once as our propitiation and our pattern. Shall we not, then, thankfully embrace this propitiation, and keep this pattern before our eyes? And though our nearest approaches will be infinitely distant, let us come as near to it as we can, and let us frequently try, by the only true touchstone, whether we have more receded or approached. If we find our defiection has been greater since the last examination, let the discovery put us upon praying more fervently, watching more vigilantly, and laboring more earnestly. If we have gained any ground, let us try to secure our advantages by pushing our progress. What a low standard, and yet it was a high one in his estimation, did he propose, who said to his friend, "If thou art not Socrates, yet live as one who would be glad to be Socrates!" To what an elevated pitch were *his* views raised, who, disdaining an inferior model, said, "Be ye like minded with Christ!"

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Every degree of goodness is only a ray from the central perfections of God. There is no shadow of right in any of his creatures but is indicative of his immeasurable goodness. The human virtues had originally a stronger resemblance to, and more intimate correspondence with, the Being from which they emanated, but by man's apostasy the analogy was not only impaired, but nearly lost. Yet a sufficient knowledge of what is good, an ample power of judging, remains to us, to convince us, that religion is a very reasonable principle, that it is addressed to our understandings as well as to our affections. God, by the revelation of himself and his purposes, does not destroy, but strengthen, our natural notions of rectitude, our rational ideas of justice, our native feelings of truth and equity. The Scripture account of the moral perfections of God, and of the manner in which he will judge the world, is consonant to those notions which he has implanted in us. Christianity exalts, clears and purifies the light of reason, ennobles and elevates the dictates of natural conscience, but does not contradict them—does not subvert our ideas of justice, nor overturn our innate sense of right and wrong. Our nature, though full of perverseness in the will, is not so preposterous in her judgment, as to believe that a revelation from God would ever teach a law in direct opposition to natural justice; that the illumination of the gospel was meant to extinguish "the candle of the Lord" set up in every human bosom. God would be inconsistent with himself, if he gave us the light of reason, dim indeed, but still a light, and then gave us a revelation, not to clear that dimness, not to enlighten that comparative darkness, but to oppose, eclipse, extinguish it.

To this capacity of judging, to this power of determining, and to your profession of faith, we venture to appeal. We are not arguing with you as with persons who deny the truth of Christianity, but addressing you as avowed believers, who neglect the application of that truth which the infidel denies. We do not propose any disallowed scheme, we do not offer any rejected doctrine, any disputed opinions; we do not invite your submission to any authority which you do not acknowledge. We suggest nothing but what your understandings assent to, nothing but what you profess to believe. Yet these truths you virtually disavow, this authority you actually renounce, this creed you practically subvert, if they do not furnish the ground of your conduct. You acknowledge all the verities of the Bible, but your lives are unaltered. Your hearts are impressible by all the tender human affections;

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awake to all "the charities of father, son, and brother;"—why are they untouched just where they ought to be most sensible, languid where they should be vigorous, dead where they should show most vital energy?

There is in this conduct a double incongruity. The persons in question not only forbear to exhibit in their own lives those admirable effects which Christianity is so calculated to produce, but they do not like to see them produced to any great extent in others. They are not backward in branding those who exhibit, in their fair proportions, the practical effects of the doctrines they themselves profess to admire, with the suspicion of hypocrisy, or the reproach of extravagance. In the common course of affairs, nothing is more censured than *inconsistency*. In religion it is quite otherwise. It is thought criminal to make no religious profession; yet, to act consistently with that profession, to make the practice square with the principle, in short, to live as we believe, exposes a person to be suspected of a deficiency of sense, or of sincerity; subjects him to a doubt, either of the integrity of his heart, or the sanity of his mind.

Christianity lays down plain rules for the conduct of those who profess it. The Bible is in the hands of this class of professors; but when a portion of it has been carelessly perused, it is considered as having done its office. It is laid down, and the reader, instead of applying to his conduct the law he has been studying, immediately applies to the law of custom, of fashionable acquaintance, of caprice, of appetite, for that rule which in conversation he would acknowledge was only to be found in the book he had been reading. In matters of faith, an indefinite assent is yielded; he only desires to be excused from the consequences they involve. He would, indeed, like to cavil at some points, but an unexamined approbation costs less trouble: so he believes in the gross, occasionally, however, indulging a little levity to show his wit, and a few doubts, to show his discrimination.

We do not act thus on other occasions. The arts we learn we turn to the purpose for which we learned them. The science we acquire we apply. The study of geometry is made applicable to practical purposes. The knowledge of mechanics is not studied for its own sake, but for the benefit of those to whom the application brings so many conveniences. The fairest hand-writing would be of little value, if the use did not follow the acquisition. Yet if religion is not only of more allowed importance, but of more universal application, than all human knowledge put together, why is it

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not, like that, brought to bear on the purpose for which it was sent, the rectification of the heart and life? If we acknowledge the Bible to be the only unerring road-book to that land to which we are travelling, why, after consulting it in the closet, do we forget it on the journey, not only neglecting the direction it affords, but pursuing contrary paths of our own devising.

It is a spectacle to excite the tenderest commiseration when we observe the excellent gifts of God to some of his most favored creatures—when we see the brightest natural faculties improved by high cultivation, together with that degree of acquaintance with religion which not only expels infidelity, but leads to a certain vague adoption of the Christian creed—when we see men, not only rich in mental endowments, but possessed of hearts glowing with generosity and kindness—when we see such beings as much absorbed in the pursuits of time and sense, as dead to the highest ends of their being, limiting their plans to the present life as completely as if they did not believe in that immortality which yet makes part of their system!—to see them overlooking the excellences which may be attained in this state preparatory to their perfection in a better; unobservant of that deep basis which God has laid in our very nature for the condition of future blessedness—forgetting how he has not only graciously put us in the way to attain it, but has exhorted, but has invited us, only to *consent*, only to *submit* to be eternally happy! When we hear the Savior of sinners condescending to express this tender regret at their reluctance, "Ye will not come to me, that ye might have life," who can, without sorrow, contemplate such a discrepancy between the practice and the destination, the pursuits and the interests, the low desires and the high possibilities, the unspeakable offers and the incorrigible blindness?

But in our lapsed humanity, sense, in opposition to faith, is too frequently the dictator. If we see through a glass, and that darkly, it is because the medium is clouded by the breath of sensuality. Appetite is the arbitrary power which renders every appeal to reason and religion fruitless. The pleasures of the present life have matter and substance, and we act as if those of heaven were dreams and visions. Self-love errs only in mistaking its objects, in putting the brief discipline which we are called to exercise here on a level with eternal suffering; it mistakes in fastening itself on the lower part of our nature, and forgetting that our souls are ourselves.

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But surely God did not give his creatures such improvable powers, such strong notices of himself, without some farther end and design than can be perfected in this brief state of being. He never would have given us a nature capable of knowing and loving him here, if it were not part of his scheme that our knowledge and love of him should be perfected in eternity. We are not the creatures of casualty. We did not come into this world by chance, or by mistake, for any uncertain end, or any undetermined purpose, but for a purpose of which we should never lose sight, for an end to which we should have a constant reference—that we might bring glory to God now, and be received by his grace to glory everlasting.

For though all the contributions of all the creatures in existence can add nothing to his inherent glory, yet he has condescended to declare that he will be glorified by us. Instead of which, what misshapen ideas do not many form of God! How do they deface the plan of Providence! Were that commodious creed true, that mercy is his exclusive attribute, how safely might we sin on; the profligate would be as secure of pardon and acceptance as the penitent, the profane as the pious, the voluptuous as the self-denying, the sceptic as the believer, the lovers of pleasure as the lovers of God.

Instead of endeavoring "to be conformed to the image of God," according to his express command, do not too many thus form a God after their own image, by thinking him such a one as themselves? Do they not almost slide into the practice of the Epicureans, who, having made a scheme of ease, indolence, and indulgence, for their conduct, prudently invented gods accommodated to their own taste and habits? In them there was consistency. It was making their faith of a piece with their practice, when they made their deities as careless, as sensual, and as pleasure-loving as themselves. But surely under a pure dispensation, to form a false and unworthy estimate of the character of the supreme Governor of the universe, is scarcely less criminal than to deny his existence. Where is the difference between divesting him of his being, and of his perfections?

Our Savior and his apostle, in their classification of sins, frequently bring together such as appear to us to have a wide disparity. "Emulation" is classed with "strife," "variances" with "idolatry," "revelling" with "murder." Those "who mind earthly things" are coupled with those "whose end is destruction." In enumerating the offences which shall

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make his second coming so tremendously awful, Christ ranks the being "overcharged with the cares of this life"—cares which we are apt to call prudence and industry—with sins, of which Christian industry and prudence would think with abhorrence.

If the apology we make is, that we are governed by example, if we plead the necessity of acting as others, especially as our acquaintance act, we intrench ourselves in excuses which have no analogy with our conduct on other occasions. We are never so disinterested as to think of being sick, or poor, or miserable for company. We never generously plead the necessity of involving ourselves in debt, because our friends are so involved—of being ruined, because those whom we love are ruined. Shall sympathy, civility, imitation, and a social spirit, then, be pleaded only on occasion of mischiefs that are irrevocable, reserved for errors that are irretrievable, for practices, the consequences of which will be irremediable?

It is a low degree in the scale of goodness with which they are contented, who congratulate themselves that they are not worse than others, and a death-blow to the noble ambition of piety when they are contented not to be better. If, indeed, they think they are perfectly happy now, they need look no farther. But before they answer this important question, are you happy? let them interrogate their own heart. If they ask it fairly, it will answer honestly, *I am not happy*. Happiness is incompatible with the state of their minds, with the nature of their pursuits. The very fondness for variety proceeds from an internal sense of indigence. They are satiated without being satisfied. The ever-renewed and ever-frustrated attempts of the fabled daughters of Danaus, whose labor, a pagan poet tells us, *was infinite, and their punishment eternal*, is the disappointing life and lot of these mistaken votaries of worldly enjoyment. The prophet annexes to somewhat of the same discouraging pursuit an awful explanatory reason, when he represents the error of those who "hew out broken cisterns which hold no water," to have originated in their "forsaking the fountain of living waters."

But even the most careless livers have not lost the natural sense of the moral quality of actions. They can reason upon them; they understand the rules they violate; they retain the perception of excellence; they preserve the feeling of kindness; they had rather be the objects of regard than dislike, if it could be acquired at a cheaper rate than that of forming their conduct by the principles they approve. *They wish they were better*, while they make no effort towards be-

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ing other than they are. Their very wish for amendment is so cold, so careless, and so slight, that it wants all the characters of repentance, all the energies of resolution, all the sincerity of reformation. While we sometimes hear from these persons, in addition to this wish, a general declaration, that *they hope they shall mend*, we seldom see any step taken in consequence of this profession; on the contrary, they are quieted for the time; they take a sort of heartless comfort in this better taste; they flatter themselves it is a proof they love virtue, though they neglect it. But they do not act thus in what truly interests them. If there is a scheme of amusement in view, the time is accurately settled, the party nicely adjusted, their punctuality is exact, there is neither delay nor excuse. It is only on matters of everlasting interest that they beg leave to postpone what they would not be thought to reject. Among all the countless generations of frail and fallen humanity, incomparably the most numerous community is the sect of *Postponers*. If, as some old divine quaintly observes, "hell is paved with good intentions," may we not say, that the postponers, of which multitudes are found in all ages, and in all churches, are the class that has contributed the greatest number of squares to the tesselated pavement. Is it not an inconsistency common to every member of this sect, to wish that the portion of his life which is gone by had been spent in virtue, while this wish is too feeble to stimulate his future days to those pursuits in which he laments the past were not spent?

You do not act thus inconsistently by any necessity of nature; depraved as the will is, in common with our other faculties, it does not necessarily rob you of the power of determining; it does not take from you the ability of imploring the strength you want. To choose the good, and to refuse the evil, is yet left to your option. Why do the Scriptures make such repeated and solemn appeals to the will, if its agency were so utterly involuntary? On this will there is no irresistible compulsion. On the supposition that this were not the case, all human laws would be unreasonable, all courts of judicature not only unjust but preposterous; all legal executions absurd as well as inhuman; for would it not be barbarous to punish crimes which the perpetrater was not left at liberty to avoid? In this case Ravaillac would have been guiltless, and Bellingham excusable.

Nor is it your reason which dissuades you from religion. If you would consult its sound and sober dictates, it would point to religion as naturally as the eye points to the object

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it would investigate, as the needle to its attracting point. It is not your reason but your corruptions which turn away your heart from religion, because it tells you that something is to be done in opposition to their sway, something to be opposed contrary to their nature, something to be renounced congenial with their gratification.

It is a fatal mistake to expect to get rid of an evil by trying to become insensible to it. To divert the attention in order to stupefy the conscience, is almost imitating the malefactor about to be executed, who swallows cordials, which, if they allay his terrors, do so only by deadening his sensibility. Take, then, a distinct view of your state, and of your prospects. Deliberation is valuable, were it only on this ground, that while you are deliberating, there is an intermission of passion, there is an interval of appetite: as these intermit, better feelings have time to rally, better thoughts to come forward, better principles to struggle for operation.

If, with hearts naturally inclined to evil (as what heart is not?) and in a world abounding with temptation, you have strayed wildly from the strait path, you are not compelled to pursue it. We need continue in sin no longer than we love it. Close not then your heart against that grace which is offered to all; it will perfect the work it has once begun, if we do not wilfully oppose its operations. Let us not therefore lay *all* the blame on our natural conceptions, as if we were compelled to sink under them. They will, indeed, continue to impede our progress, but unless aided by our inclination, they will not finally obstruct it. But wilfully to sin on, and yet expect pardon through the merits of our Redeemer, looks like an impious plot to blind the eyes of Omniscience, and to tie the hands of Omnipotence. We shall always have this infallible criterion by which to judge of our state; we may be assured that our sins are not forgiven if they are not mortified. We need not pry into our destination in the inscrutable decrees of the Almighty, but in our own rectified affections, our own subdued will. Let us never remit our diligence by any persuasion of our security, nor slacken our obedience by any fond conceit that our names are written in heaven.

But alas! the soul is full of the body, the intellect is steeped in sense. The spiritual life is immersed in the animal. Reason and appetite, instead of keeping their distinct natures, are in many instances so mixed and incorporated, that it is not always easy to decompose and reduce them to their separate principles. It is in want of cordial sincerity which pre-

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vents truth from being sought, and where she is not sought, she will not be found. Internal purity of heart, and sanctity of spirit, afford a fairer exhibition of religion, than the most subtle dogmas, and the most zealous debates.

If we seek peace in God, we shall never fail of finding it; if we look for it in the world, it is to look for a clear stream from a polluted source. We have a spirit within us that will occasionally, though unbidden, remind us of our high original, "from what height fallen." How widely have we wandered in search of the good we have lost! We have sought for it in the tumults of ambition, in the pleasures of voluptuousness, in the misleadings of flattery, in our own high imaginations, in the self-gratulations of pride, in the secret indulgence of that vanity, which, probably, it has been one part of our pride not to cure but to conceal. Let us begin to seek for it where alone it is to be found, where alone God has promised it—in the "way" which he has opened, in the "truth" which he has revealed, and in the "life" which he has quickened.

Do not, then, any longer make religion an incidental item in your scheme of life. Do not turn over the consideration of it to chance; make it a part of your daily plan; take it up as a set business; give it an allotted portion in the distribution of your daily concerns, while you admit it as the pervading principle of them all. You carry on no other transaction casually; you do not conduct your profession or manage your estate by fits and starts. You do not expect your secular business will go on well without minding it. You set about it intently; you transact it with a fixed design; you consider it as a definite object. You would not be satisfied with it if it brought you no return, still less would you be satisfied not to know whether it brought any return or not. Yet you are contented as to this great business of life, though you perceive no evidence of its progress. You see no absurdity in a religious profession which leaves you as indigent as it found you. Does it not look as if your sincerity in the one case did not keep pace with your earnestness in the other; as if your religion was a shadow, and your secular concerns were the only reality?

Begin then to be distinct in your purposes, explicit in your designs, sincere in your pursuits. You profess to read the Scriptures occasionally; if the perusal has hitherto produced no sensible effect, this is only an additional motive for making the incidental practice habitual. Do not intermit it under pretence that it has produced no benefit. It is a great thing

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to keep within the use of God's appointed means. If you had not some pleasure in even a casual perusal, you would avoid it altogether. The blessing which has been so long delayed perhaps has not been cordially requested; when earnestly desired, it will not be finally withheld. Light precedes warmth in the daily course of nature. Begin then to consider that knowledge not turned to profit will be a grand article at the final reckoning. How many thousands have not even made the progress which you have made; have not attained that literal acquaintance with the Bible which you have attained. *They* are utterly, perhaps irreclaimably, ignorant. *You* have laid in, at least in your understanding, a certain though perhaps slender stock of materials, on which the divine light only waits to shine till you petition for it; that light which, if you will open your eyes to receive it, will shine more and more unto the perfect day. God has assured you in his word that he "*waits* to be gracious." The compassionate father in the parable moved more eagerly to embrace his son, than the returning prodigal to meet the parent. He scarcely waited for his protestations; the pardon prevented the confession; he condescended to rejoice even in his *acceptance* of forgiveness.

It is not a new scheme which is proposed to you; it is not an imaginary project, an untried device. There is nothing unreasonable in the hope held out; no elevation in piety but what with the offered aid is attainable; nothing but what multitudes have attained; not merely prophets and saints and holy men, but persons whose cases were as unpromising as yours; men laboring under the same corruptions; disturbed by the same passions, assailed by the same trials, drawn aside by the same temptations, exposed to the same dangerous world; long led astray by its customs, long enslaved by its maxims. The same grace which rescued them is offered to you. The same spirit which struggled with their hearts is, perhaps, while you are reading these feeble lines, striving with yours. Resist not the impulse. Complete the assimilation. Let not the resemblance be more imperfect in its fairer features than in its more deformed. Imitate their noble resolution. Recollect the glorious promise made "to him that overcometh." The same power which delivered them waits to deliver you. The ten thousand times ten thousand who now stand before the throne, were not innocent, but penitent—not guiltless men, but redeemed sinners. The same God waits to be gracious. The same Savior intercedes. The same spirit invites. The same heaven is

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open. Plead that gracious nature, implore that divine intercessor, invoke that blessed spirit. Say not it is too late. Early and late are relative, not positive terms. While the door is yet open there is no hour of marked exclusion. So may an inheritance among the saints in light still be yours.

CHAP. XXII.

Reflections of an inconsistent Christian after a serious Perusal of the Bible.

I PROFESS to believe that Christianity is true. Its promises are high; but what have been its profits. It is time to inquire into its truth and its advantages. It never, indeed, pledged itself to confer honors or emoluments; but it engaged to bestow benefits of another kind. If the Christian is deceived in these, he has nothing to console him. Now what am I the better for Christianity? It speaks of changing the heart from darkness to light. What illumination has my mind experienced from it?—But here a doubt begins to arise. Am I indeed a Christian? What claims have I to the character?

Is there any material difference, whether I depend on heaven as a thing of course, to those who have been baptized, though they possess no corresponding temper and conduct; or whether I never reflect that there is a heaven, or whether I absolutely disbelieve that there is any such place? Is the distinction so decisive between speculative unbelief, practical infidelity, and total negligence, as that either of them can afford an assurance of eternal happiness in preference to the other? Yet while the thought of heaven never enters my mind, should I not hotly resent it as an injury, if any one disputed my title to it? Should I not treat him who advised me to a more serious life as an enemy, and him who suspected I required it, as a calumniator? Is it not, however, worth the inquiry, whether my confidence of obtaining it is well founded; and whether my danger arises from my ignorance or my unfitness?

If the Scriptures be authentic—if, as I have always professed to believe, they indicate a state of eternal happiness, together with the means of attaining to it—then surely not to direct my thoughts to that state, not to apply my attention to those means, is to neglect the state and the things for

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which I was sent into the world. Providence, doubtless, intended that every species of being should reach the perfection for which it was created. Shall his only rational creature be the only one which falls short of the end for which he was made? the only one who refuses to reach the top of his nature, who refuses to comply with his original destination?

If I were quite certain that I was not created for such a great and noble end as Christianity has revealed, I should then be justified in acting as a being would naturally act, who has no higher guide than sense, no nobler incentive than appetite, no larger scope than time, no ampler range than this world. And though I might then regret that my powers and faculties, my capacities and desires, were formed for so low a purpose, and their exercise limited to so brief a space, yet it would not, in that case, be acting inconsistently, to turn my fugitive possessions, and my contracted span, to the best account of present enjoyment.

But if I have indeed, as I profess to have, any faith however low, any hope however feeble, any prospect however faint, is it rational to act in such open opposition to my profession? Is it right or reasonable, to believe and to neglect, to avow and to disregard, to profess and to oppose, the same thing? Do I raise my character for that understanding on which I value myself, if, while I make confession of a faith which has been adopted by the wisest men in different ages, my temper is not, like theirs, conformed to it, my will is not, like theirs, subdued to it, my life is not, like theirs, governed by it.

I think this world more certain than the next, because I have the evidence of my senses to its reality; and because its enjoyments are present, visible, tangible. But the same being who gave my senses, gives also reason and faith; and do not these afford to the sincere inquirer other evidence of no less power? Even in many natural things, we receive the evidence of reason as confidently as the testimony of sense. Our reason informs us, that the things we see could not have been produced without a cause which we do not see; we might as well say they have no being, as that they had no cause; and yet the cause lies as completely out of our reach, as the things of another world. The unseen things, then, may be as satisfactorily proved by other arguments, as the things we know are proved by our senses. But the highest evidence of things not seen is faith. Even this principle we admit in worldly things, but reject in spiritual. We should know very little of this earth, if we knew only what we have

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seen. Now we believe that a multitude of things exist which we never saw, and which few, comparatively, have seen. This is the evidence of faith in the testimony of the relater.

I see persons in the ordinary affairs of life act upon the mere report of authentic information; conduct concerns analogous to those whose success is made known to them by impartial evidence, and act confidently on the relation of credible witnesses; and they would be thought perverse and unreasonable, were not their conduct influenced by such competent testimony. Is it, then, only in the momentous concern of religion, where these appropriate evidences are allowed to be incontestable, where a revelation from heaven, where the attestation of undeniable witnesses, has established the truth in the minds of inquiring men beyond a doubt—is it only where the testimony is the most unquestionable, and the object the most transcendently important, that neglect is pardonable, that delay is prudent, that indifference is safe?

It is time to arrive at some decision on a question which, if it be any thing, is every thing; which, if it be indeed founded in infallible truth, involves consequences so vast, effects so lasting, that all the other concerns of the whole world shrink into nothing, when weighed against my individual concern in this single business.

That thinking mind which enables me to frame these reflections, that sentient spirit which suggests these apprehensions, those irrepressible feelings which drive out my thoughts, and force my speculations beyond the present scene, prove, that I have something within me which was made for immortality. If, then, I am once convinced of these truths, can I any longer hesitate to devote my best thoughts to my highest good, my chiefest care to my nearest concern, my most intense solicitude to my everlasting interests?

Lord, I believe, help thou my unbelief! Convert my dead faith into an operative principle! Let my sluggish will be quickened, let my reluctant desires give some signs of life. Let it be an evidence of the real existence of my faith, that it is not inert.

We talk of the glory of heaven as coolly, and hear of it with as much indifference, as if it were the unalienable birthright of every nominal Christian, and that our security left no room for our solicitude. But I now find, on examining it more closely, that the Bible speaks of a thing which Christians of my class neglect to take into the account; a *fitness* for that glory, a spirit prepared for that state, which God has prepared for them that love him. It not only promises them

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heaven, but quickens their desires after it, qualifies them for the enjoyment of it. Now, can I conscientiously declare that I possess, that I have ever endeavored to possess, those desires, without which heaven is unattainable; those dispositions, without which, if it could be attained, it would not be a place of happiness? Is it, then, probable, arguing upon merely rational grounds, that God will receive me to his presence there, if I continue to live without him in the world? Will he accept me when I come to die, alienated from him in heart and thought as I have lived?

After all, uncertainty is no comfortable state. It is safer to seek a satisfactory solution to my doubts by serious inquiry; to seek tranquillity to my heart by earnest prayer. It is better to implore the promised aid, to strengthen my vacillating mind, even though I renounce a little present ease, a little temporary pleasure. If, indeed, avoiding to think of the evil would remove it, if averting my eyes from the danger would annihilate it, all would be well. But if, on the contrary, fearing it now may avert it forever, common sense, reasonable self-love, mere human prudence, compel me to make the computation of the relative value of time and eternity. I may, indeed, as I have frequently done, postpone my purpose to some future time. But then I am not so skilled in the doctrine of chances as to be quite certain that time may ever arrive. He that intends to reform to-morrow does not repent to-day. When delay is danger, is it not foolish to delay? When it may be destruction, is it not something worse than folly? I will arise, and go to my Father, &c. &c. &c.

CHAP. XXIII.

The Christian in the World.

"THE only doctrinal truth," says bishop Sanderson, "which Solomon insisted on, when he took the whole world for his large but barren text, was, that all is vanity." This was not the verdict of a hermit railing from his cell at pleasures untasted, or at grandeur unenjoyed. Among the sons of men, not one had sought with more unremitted diligence, or had wider avenues to the search, for whatever good either skill or power could extract out of the world, than Solomon. No one could judge of the sweets which can be drawn from this grand alembic with higher natural abilities, or with deeper

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experimental wisdom. He did not descant on the vanity of the world so eloquently till he had considered it accurately, and examined it practically. He was not contented, like a learned theorist, to collect his notions from philosophy or history, or hearsay; he well knew what he said, "and whereof he affirmed." All upon which he so pathetically preached he had seen with his eyes, heard with his ears, and, in his widely-roving search, had experienced in his own disappointed mind, and felt in his own aching heart. He goes on to prove, by an induction of particulars, the grand truth propounded in his thesis, the *vanity of the world*. He shows, in a regular series of experiments, how he had ransacked its treasures, exhausted its enjoyments, and, even to satiety, revelled in its honors, riches, and delights. He had been an intellectual as well as sensual voluptuary, and had emptied the resources of knowledge as well as of pleasure. Then reverting in the close of his discourse to the point from which he had set out, he again pronounces, that all is vanity.

"The conclusion of the whole matter" which he draws from this melancholy argument, as finely exhibited as pensively conceived, is a solemn injunction to others to remember, what it is to be feared the preacher himself had sometimes forgotten, that the whole duty of man is to fear God, and keep his commandments: winding up his fine peroration with a motive in which every child of Adam is equally, is awfully concerned, "*because* God shall bring every work into judgment."

May not every real Christian, while his heart is touched with the affecting truth of the text, be admonished by this solemn valedictory declaration? May he not learn the lesson inculcated at less expense than it was acquired by this great practical master of the science of wisdom? If another sovereign was told there was no royal way to geometry, the King of Israel has opened a royal way to a more divine philosophy. By the benefit to be derived from contemplating this illustrious instance of "how little are the great," the Christian may set out where Solomon ended. He may be convinced of the vanity of the world at a price far cheaper than Solomon paid for it, by a way far safer than his own experience. He may convert the experiment made by the royal preacher to his own personal account. He may find in the doctrines of the gospel a confirmation of its truth, in its precepts a counteraction to its perils, in its promises a consolation for its disappointments.

In this world, such as Solomon has vividly painted it, the

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Christian is to live—is to live, through divine assistance, untainted by its maxims, uncontaminated by its practices. Man being obviously designed by his Creator for social life, and society being evidently his proper place and condition, it seems to be his duty, not so much to consider what degree of possible perfection he might have attained in that state of seclusion to which he was never destined, as how he may usefully fill his allotted sphere in the world for which he was made; how he may conscientiously discharge the duties to which he is plainly called by providential ordination. To think how he may acquit himself well in his actual state and condition, is clearly more profitable, than to waste his time and spirits in devising the best speculative scheme of life, to the adoption of which there is little probability of his ever being appointed.

We were not sent into this world with orders to make ourselves miserable, but with abilities, and directions, and helps, to search out the best possibilities of happiness which remain to beings fallen from that state of moral and mental rectitude in which man was created; to make the best of the ruins of that perfect world whose beauty he had marred, and whose capacity of conferring felicity he had fatally impaired. Human life, therefore, abounding as it does in blessings and mercies, is not the blissful vision which youthful fancy images, or poetry feigns, or romance exhibits. It is in a considerable measure compounded of painful and of dull realities, and not a splendid tissue of grand events or brilliant exploits; it is to some an almost unvaried state of penury, to many a series of cares and troubles, to all a state of probation. But the primeval punishment, the sentence of labor, like the other inflictions of Him who in judgment remembers mercy, is transformed into a blessing. And, whether we consider the manual industry of the poor, or the intellectual exertions of the superior classes, we shall find that diligent occupation, if not criminally perverted from its end, is at once the instrument of virtue and the secret of happiness. Man cannot be safely trusted with a life of leisure.

As the character about to be briefly considered is presumed to be a real Christian, it would be superfluous, for two reasons, to insist that his vocation in the world must be lawful. It is not to be supposed that a religious man will ever engage in an employment that is illicit; and it is almost equally beyond supposition, that persons who are actually so engaged, will cast their eyes on a book whose tendency is serious.

But the most unexceptionable profession is not exempt

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from dangers. It requires strict watchfulness, not only to conduct the most useful undertaking in a right spirit, and with a constant eye to Him, to whom every intelligent being is accountable; it requires not only constant vigilance against the allurements of avarice, and the baits of ambition, but it requires caution against the unsuspected mischiefs of embarking so widely, or plunging so deeply in any temporal concern, as almost necessarily to deteriorate the character. He embarks too widely, and plunges too deeply, however honorable be the undertaking, if it absorb the whole man—if it so crowd his mind with interfering schemes and complicated projects, as to leave no time and no thought, and gradually no inclination, for that reference which should be the ultimate end of all human designs.

It can never be too often repeated, however writers tire with saying, and readers with hearing it, that it is scarcely more necessary to address serious suggestions to men sunk in gross pursuits, than to that large, and important, and valuable class, whose danger lies in the very credit, and dignity, and usefulness of their engagements. A thousand dissertations have been written, and yet the theme is not exhausted, on that hackneyed but neglected truth, that *we are undone by lawful things*, by excess in things right in themselves, and which only become wrong by being inordinately pursued—pursued to the neglect of things more essential; when what is even laudable is exclusively sought, to the forgetfulness of what is indispensable. Things may not only be comparatively, but positively, good, and yet not be "things which accompany salvation." They may not only be intended to be instrumental, but actually be so, both in advancing the prosperity, and in restraining the disorders of this world, and so far be highly valuable, and yet the act may be substituted for that principle which should be its inspiring motive. The fault, however, is not in the thing, but in the mind, when useful actions are not done with a reference to the highest end. Of this reference a Christian will aim never to lose sight. He will, before he engage in the concerns of the day, prepare his mind by fervent devotion; not only imploring direction in the common course of action, and the expected occurrences of the day, but strength to meet those unknown occasions and unsuspected events, which, in human life, and especially in a life of business, so frequently occur. Without this panoply, he will not venture to engage with the world; but the armor which he put on in solitude he will not lay aside in the field of battle; it was for that warfare he had buckled it on.

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As the lawyer has his compendium of cases and precedents, the legislator his statutes, the soldier his book of tactics, and every other professor his *vadè mecum* to consult in difficulties, the Christian, to whichever of the professions he may belong, will take his morning lecture from a more infallible directory, comprehending not only cases and precedents, but abounding also with those seminal principles which contain the essence of all actual duty, from which all practical excellence is deducible. This spirit of laws differs from all other legal institutes, some of which, from that imperfection inseparable from the best human things, have been found unintelligible, some impracticable, and some have become obsolete. The divine law is subject to no such disadvantages. It is perfect in its nature, intelligible in its construction, and eternal in its obligation.

This sacred institute he will consult, not occasionally, but daily. Unreminded of general duty, unfurnished with some leading hint for the particular demand, he will not venture to rush into the bustle, trial, and temptation of the day. Of this aid he will possess himself with more ease, and less loss of time, as he will not have to ransack a multiplicity of folios for a detached case, or an individual intricacy; for, though he may not find in the Bible specific instances, yet he will discover in every page some governing truth, some rule of universal application, the spirit of which may be brought to bear on almost every circumstance; some principle suited to every purpose, and competent to the solution of every moral difficulty. Scripture does not, indeed, pretend to include technical or professional peculiarities, but it exhibits the temper and the conduct which may be made applicable to the special concerns of every man, whatever be his occupation. He will find in it the right direction to the right pursuit, the straight road to the proper end; the duty of a pure intention; and the prohibition of false measures to attain even a laudable object. No hurry or engagement will ever make him lose sight of that sacred aphorism so pointedly addressed to men of business, "He that maketh haste to be rich shall hardly be innocent." The cautionary texts he admired in his closet, he will not treasure up as classical mottoes to amuse his fancy, or embellish his discourse, but will adopt as rules of conduct, and bring them into every worldly transaction, whether commercial, forensic, medical, military, or whatever else be his professed object. He will not adjust his scale of duty by the false standard of the world, nor by any measure of his own devising; he has but one standard of judging, but one

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measure of conduct—the infallible word of God. This rule he will take as he finds it, he will use as he is commanded; he will not bend it to his own convenience, he will not accommodate it to his own views, his own passions, his own emolument, his own reputation.

Here it may be asked, Why is not Scripture more explicit in direction, more minute in detail? We find our self-love perpetually furnishing subterfuges for evading duties, and multiplying exceptions to rules. God, who knows all hearts, and foresaw their captiousness, might, it may be said, have guarded against it by more enlarged instructions. The Holy Spirit, however, did not see fit to descend to such minutiæ, but, having given the principle, left man to the exercise of his reason, in the application of the general law to his particular case; for if he is left to the use of his judgment, it is not that he may pervert truth, but apply it. His understanding and rectitude are perpetually called into joint exercise, for that which is immediately the duty of one man, another may not be called to perform.

Not to distress the mind, therefore, with unnecessary scruples, nor to perplex it by a multiplicity of circumstances, some things are left indefinite. An incumbered body of institutes would have been too vast and complicated for general use; that time would be taken up in selecting them, which is better employed in acting upon them. Even were every particular of every duty, in all its bearings, circumstantially ramified, it would not so much direct the conduct, as furnish new pretences for neglecting it. Then, as now, it would be seen rather that the will is perverse, than the understanding unsatisfied. More amplification would not have lessened objections. Those who complain now that the rule is not explicit, would complain then that it was tedious. A fuller exposition would neither have cleared doubts nor prevented disputes. It would then have been charged with redundancy, as it is now with defectiveness.

If the world carries contamination to the heart, it carries also to the right-minded a preservative; as the viper's blood is said to be an antidote for its bite. The living world is to such persons an improving exemplification of the moral lessons of history. If we apply to our own improvement the recorded excellences or errors of which we read; if we are struck with the successes or defeats of ambition; the pursuits or disappointments of vanity; the sordid accumulations of avarice, or the wasting ravages of prodigality; if we are moved with instances of vice and virtue in men of whom we

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know nothing but what the historian is pleased to tell us, and of whom he perhaps knew not much more; if we read with interest of the violence of parties, of which both the leaders and the followers have been long laid in the dust; if we are affected, as every intelligent mind cannot but be affected, with these pictures of things, how much benefit may a well-directed mind derive from seeing them realized: from seeing the old scenes acted over again by living performers; from living himself among the *dramatis personæ* as one of the actors; from taking a personal interest in a repetition of things which he condemned or applauded when only coldly presented to his understanding, and at which his principles revolted or rejoiced, even in the dead letter of narrative. He now sees the same sentiments embodied, the same passions brought into action, similar opinions operating upon actual conduct.

If he is deeply touched when history presents to his view the errors of high and heroic minds, when it exhibits the aberrations of superior genius, how much more lively will be his regret, when he sees, among his own acquaintance, the ardor of a noble and ingenuous mind exclusively consumed on objects, which might indeed be accounted great if this world were all, but which never gives any practical intimation that there is another. But how much more pungent will be his sorrow, when he observes lofty and sagacious spirits neglecting to make the most even of this brief state of being;—when he sees men who might have made the world a better thing than they found it, had they employed their superior powers of intellect in studying how they might please God, by promoting the best interests of his creatures; when he sees such understandings clouded by intemperance, such minds absorbed in studying the qualities of a race horse, or calculating the chances of a gaming-table!

In another, and a more estimable class of characters, he is struck with mingled admiration and concern, in observing what good and resembling imitations of religion are made by honor, sense, and spirit; how respectably moral honesty, kindness, and generosity may, to superficial observers, personate Christianity, may even execute the act of piety with an utter destitution of the principle. He sees in certain minds some masterly strokes of natural beauty, which at once dignify and embellish them, so as, on some occasions, to tempt him to forget that they are not religious. But these brilliant qualities are not infused into the entire character, the excellence is limited to a few shining points, and the hollows are proportioned to the heights. Rich in some splendid virtues,

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there is no uniformity in the principle; there is perhaps some allowed sin in the practice; while in the character of the real Christian, though there may be much infirmity, there is a desire of consistency—there is no deliberate transgression—there is even no unrepented error.

These living lessons the pious observer will turn to account. The impression thus made on his heart, from actual observation, will sink deeper, and be more durable, than the instruction to be obtained by a mere intellectual view of mankind, from information collected from writers, who are obliged to pick up facts, not from having witnessed them, but as they find them in preceding writers; men who know little of the causes of which they describe the effects, or the motives of the actions they record. History paints men, acute observation anatomizes them.

If he regret that his necessary duties in the world trench on the time he would gladly devote to religious pursuits, let him take comfort that these regrets, if sincere, are an earnest of his safety. The very corruptions to which he is witness will experimentally convince him of the truth of a doctrine, which is nowhere more completely learned than in the bustle of life. The perception of this evil in others makes him watch against similar tendencies within; tendencies which only the grace daily invoked by him prevents from breaking out into action. This deep conviction of man's corruption, instead of impairing his benevolence, will improve it. It will teach him not to expect too much from so imperfect a being, as well as to bear with the errors which his belief of the doctrine had led him to expect. This, together with his intercourse with the world, will cure him of that mistake so common to persons who have not lived in it, that of expecting no faults in those which a fond imagination, on a first acquaintance, had led them to believe perfect, and who, on the inevitable discovery, become too strongly disgusted with errors and imperfections, on which they ought to have reckoned. He will never use his full conviction of the truth of which we have been speaking to the purposes of unworthy distrust, or base suspicion. On the contrary, though he will exercise his discernment in the knowledge of men and his discretion as to the confidence to be placed in them, he will not be ever on the look-out to detect, much less to expose their errors. Though he "loves not the world" in the Scripture sense of the term, he loves the individuals of whom it is composed, with the affection of sympathy. He will put a large and liberal construction on their actions, but he will not stretch

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that latitude to the vindication of any thing that is corrupt in principle, or criminal in conduct. Nor will he be always on the defensive in his intercourse with them: he will not act with the narrow selfishness of the sordid trader, who is jealous of every man with whom he has business to transact, on no higher ground than lest he should lose money by him; while he tolerates in his character every vice which will not interfere with his pecuniary transactions.

It is his aim to reconcile that charity which believeth all things, with that discrimination of character which shows us, not only so many who are bad, but so much imperfection, we may say, so much evil, in the comparatively good. To love and serve those in whom we at the same time perceive no little moral defect, is turning our spiritual discernment to a practical account. This principle, while it serves to preserve us from an undue admiration of others, will teach us to suspect these, or other defects, in ourselves.

The Christian in the world, anxious to improve his scanty leisure, will rescue from mere diversion those hours which cannot prudently be subtracted from business. To a man thus circumstanced, the Sunday is felt to be indeed a blessing; to him it is emphatically "a delight." Instead of appropriating it as a day of premeditated conviviality, he converts it into a stated season of enjoyment of another kind. He hardly needs the injunction to "remember" to keep it holy, though he is not unmindful, that, of the ten commandments, it is only the one prefaced with that admonition. He considers the observance as almost more his privilege than his duty. The expectation of its return cheers him under the perplexities of the week. He anticipates it as a rest here, and as a foretaste of eternal rest. He enlarges his pious exercises with the more satisfaction, as he is clearly assured that he is not on this day in danger of trenching on his professional duties; and from this reflection, his heart more warmly expands in gratitude to Him whose day it more immediately is. He feels that, if it were barely a season ordained by some public act, a royal proclamation enjoining it as a necessary interval between the labors which close one week and those which begin another, a contrivance of ease, a measure of political prudence or personal tenderness to prevent the bodily machine and the overlabored mind from wearing out, he would be grateful for its institution; but to him the day comes fraught with benefits and blessings of a still higher kind. It is an appointment of God; *that* entitles it to his reverence; it is an institution of spiritual mercy; it is

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the stated season for recruiting his mental vigor; for inspecting his accounts with his Maker; for taking a more exact survey of the state of his heart; for examining into his faults; for enumerating his mercies; for laying in, by prayer, fresh stores of faith and holiness; for repairing what both may have lost in the turmoil of the week. His heated passions have leisure to cool; his hurried mind to regain its tranquil tone; his whole internal state to be regulated; his mistakes to be reviewed; his temper to be new set; his piety to be braced up to the pitch from which it may have been sunk in the atmosphere he had been breathing. The pious man of business relishes his family society and fireside enjoyments with a keenness not always felt by others. If "the harp, and the tabret, and the viol," are not always heard in his feasts, he does what those who listen to them do not always remember to do, for "he considers the works of the Lord, and regards the operations of his hands." It is not enough for the devoted Christian that his life is dedicated to him who gave it, his spirit is, as it were, exhaled in his service.*

CHAP. XXIV.

Difficulties and Advantages of the Christian in the World.

THERE are two things of which a wise man will be scrupulously careful, his conscience and his credit. Happily they are almost inseparable concomitants; they are commonly kept or lost together; the same things which wound the one, usually giving a blow to the other: yet it must be confessed that conscience and a mere worldly credit are not, in all instances, allowed to subsist together. God and our hearts—we speak of hearts which are looked into and examined—always condemn us for the same things, things, perhaps, for which we do not suffer in the opinion of the world: the

* It is to be regretted, that the members of a learned and honorable profession, and which has produced so many exemplary characters, should appoint their consultations on Sundays. It is urged in excuse, that they cannot clash with any public courts or sittings on that day. The leading men, by this custom, force some of those whose practice is less established into a breach of their duty, against which their consciences perhaps revolt. Might not one of these two sacrifices obviate the necessity which is pleaded in its vindication? Might they not either reject such a superfluity of business as induces it; or, if that be too much to expect, might they not subtract the time from their social and convivial hours?

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world, in return, not seldom condemns us for actions, for which we have the approbation of God and our consciences. Is it right to put the verdict of such opposite judges on an equality, nay, to abide by that which will be less than nothing when *his* sentence, whose favor is eternal life, shall be finally pronounced?

Between a wounded conscience and a wounded credit there is the same difference as between a crime and a calamity. Of two inevitable evils, religion instructs us to submit to that which is inferior and involuntary. As much as reputation exceeds every worldly good, so much, and far more, is conscience to be consulted before credit—if credit that can be called which is derived from the acclamations of a mob, whether composed of "the great vulgar or the small."

Yet are we not perpetually seeing, that, to secure this worthless fame, peace and conscience are sacrificed? For to what but a miserably false estimate of the relative value of these two blessings; what but the preference of character to duty—in support, too, of a rotten part of it—is it, that the wretched system of duelling not only maintains its ground, but is increasing with a frightful rapidity? If we have, perhaps, never heard of a truly religious man engaged in a duel,* it is not that, with all his caution, he is not liable to provocations and insults, as well as other men; nor that he has no quick sense of injuries, no spirit to repel attacks, and no courage to defend himself. He who bears insults is made of like passions with him who revenges them; his pride longs to break out if it dared; for even a good man, as the prelate quoted in the last chapter observes, "has more to do with this one viper, than with all his other corruptions."

But, among other causes, his safety lies in this, that he has always endeavored to keep clear of those initiatory offences which lead to this catastrophe; it is because he has been habitually governed by principles of a directly contrary tendency, and has not the lesson of forbearance to learn, when he is called upon to practice it; because he has not indulged himself in those habits, and as little as may be in those societies which lay a man open to the consequences of which ungoverned appetites are the source; because he has always considered pride and passion as the possible seeds of murder; an

* Lord Herbert of Cherbury, the first of our deistical writers, and the last hero of our ancient chivalry, with that fantastic combination of devotion and gallantry which characterized the profession of knighthood, tells us, in the Memoirs of his own Life, that he strictly maintained the religious observance of the Sabbath, except when called out to fight a duel for a point of honor, which he seemed to have thought a paramount duty.

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impure glance as the first approach to that crime which is the ordinary source of duelling—the combined violation of these two commandments being as closely connected in practice as is their position in the decalogue. It is observable, that while the shifts and stratagems to which a man is commonly driven by illicit connections so often lead to duelling, yet that the charge of that crime itself, or of any other equally atrocious, far more rarely provokes a challenge, than the charge of the lie, to which the crime has compelled him to resort. Can there be a more striking instance of the false estimate of character and virtue, than that the offence is not made to consist in the falsehood itself, but in the accusation of it.

The man of mere worldly principles keeps himself in the broad way, which, should events occur, and temptations arise to irritate him, may at any time lead to such a termination. His habits of life, his choice of associates, his systematic resolution to revenge every insult, makes his common path a path of danger. His pride is always ready primed; he carries the inflammable matter in his habit, and the first spark may cause an explosion; while the man of principle, in addition to all the other guards before enumerated, wants, indeed, but this single consideration to deter him from the spirit of duelling; that it is the act of all others which stands in the most determined opposition to the law of God, and the spirit of the gospel; that it is a studied, deliberate, premeditated subversion of one of the most imperious duties of Christianity, by making it infamous to forgive injuries.

And even if a man be more correct in his habits, still if the maxims of the world, and not those of Christianity, govern him, he loses sight of the great principles which would restrain excesses in temper, as well as in conduct. He first loses sight of these, perhaps by negligence in private devotion, possibly by a careless attendance on public worship. Thus freeing himself from these observances, he loses sight of the obligations of religion, and losing this strongest "muzzle of restraint," it is the less wonder that a small provocation tempts him to offer bloody sacrifices to that fantastic but cruel idol, worldly honor. It is the less wonder that a neglected, even where there is not a perverted principle, should end in the murder of his friend, and the destruction of his own soul; for of a merely convivial friendship, a duel is no very uncommon termination.

But to return.—In the ordinary pursuits of life, the good man differs but little from others, in the keenness with which

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he embarks in enterprise, or in the diligence with which he prosecutes it; but he carries it on in another spirit; he is not less solicitous in the pursuit, but there is less perturbation in his solicitude; he makes no undue sacrifices to attain his object. He seeks the divine blessing, not that he may slacken his own exertions, but that he may be directed in them, supported under them. Sanguine, perhaps, by nature, he yet takes into the account the probabilities of disappointment: this, when it occurs, he bears as one, who, though careful of the motive and mode of his conduct, had put the affair into the hands of the Master of events. His failure does not discourage him from fresh exertions, when occasions equally right present themselves. He is grateful for success, but not intoxicated by it. Under defeat he is resigned, but not desponding. He measures the intrinsic value of an object by asking his own mind, though he thinks so highly of its importance now, what he shall probably think of it when his ardor is cooled, and especially what he shall think of it when all things shall be brought into judgment. This question settled, either moderates or augments the interest he takes in it.

Knowing that whatever he proposes in the way of public good is liable to be suspected of imprudence or mistaken zeal, he turns this exposure to suspicion to his own advantage. It leads him to examine his project more accurately to spy out its weak side, if it have any; and to anticipate, by the operation of a well-exercised judgment, the objections which his opponents are likely to make. Foreseeing the points which may create opposition, he guards against it, either by altering his plan, if defective, or preparing to defend it, if sound. One of his great difficulties, and yet it is his only security, will be his custom of referring all matters in debate "to the law and to the testimony." This will lead him constantly to oppose principle to expediency. Of this incommodious integrity, he must abide the censure and the consequences. He will have no share in the crooked arts and intrigues by which some men rise so fast, and become so popular. He will detest craft almost as much as fraud, and the pitiful shifts of a narrow policy, as much as he will love the light and open path of truth and honesty. He does not slacken in his undeviating strictness, though he is aware that this is the quality which peculiarly exposes him to misrepresentation. Exertion, struggle, conflict, these are the trials for which he prepares himself. Thankful for tranquillity when it can be honestly obtained, enjoying repose when he has fairly earned it; he yet knows that this is not the world

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in which they are to be looked for with any certainty, or enjoyed with any continuance; and this conviction of its instability and fluctuation is one of the many arguments with which he seeks to arm himself against the fear of death.

The unequal distribution of the good things of this life, the inferior success of men of more virtue, higher talent, and a better outset, than others of his acquaintance, whose beginning was low, and whose deserts equivocal, remind him that prosperity is no sure test of merit, and that the favor of heaven is not to be estimated by success. God, he recollects, has made no special promise of prosperity to his children. When given, it is to be esteemed no certain mark of his approbation; when withdrawn, it is often in mercy; when withheld, it is because God has higher designs for his less prosperous servants. As to himself, the events of every day teach him, that he had expected more from human life than it had to bestow, and that his disappointments arise not less from his own sanguine temper, than from the deceits of that world which it had overrated.

The world, especially, we may here remark, the commercial world, particularly in these awful times, is calculated to teach forbearance far more than sequestered life, because men often suffer so severely in their fortune and credit by the errors or misfortunes of others. If the good man suffer by his own fault, he will find a fresh motive for humility; if by the fault of another, for patience; if more directly from the hand of God, for submission. Whatever be the fluctuations of his fortune, his faith will gain stability, for he will discern an invisible hand directing all events for his ultimate good. If he is placed in a state of peculiar agitation, God intends to lead him by it to seek his rest where only it can be found. If in a state of singular difficulty, it is to show him his own weakness, and his immediate dependence on him who gives strength to the weak. This principle admitted, will furnish new motives to watchfulness and prayer, without any diminution of activity or spirit.

His observations on the gradual process by which the love of money monopolizes the hearts of others, teach him to guard his own against its encroachments. He sees that the first designs of men are commonly moderate. Few take in at one view all the length they go afterwards. They look not beyond a certain eminence. On this they fix as the summit of their desires. But what appeared high at a distance sinks when approached; is nothing when attained;—"Alps rise on Alps;"—a further distance presents a further height

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this, they are sure, will bound their desires: this attained, they are resolved to retire and dedicate their lives and their riches to the end for which, they persuade themselves, they have been toiling. But with the acquisition, the desire increases; wants grow out of riches. The moderate man is become insatiable. The principle thrives with the attainment of its object. Though hope is exchanged for possession, yet the restless principle continues to work, and will work on, unless a higher principle, by which he is every day less likely and less desirous to be governed, should arise to check it.

Society being composed of intelligent human beings, the wise man knows that something may be generally learned from it, relative to the human character; that some benefit may be reaped, even if little positive good appear in it; and more does sometimes appear than we are willing to put to profit. Lessons may be extracted from the very faults of men; from the vehemence of their passions, the mistakes of their judgment, the blindness of their prejudice.

The Holy Scriptures frequently make the anxious diligence of men, in the pursuit of worldly advantages, a lesson which a better man would do well to improve upon in his higher pursuits. He may find in *their* industry a standard, though not a model: the wisdom he learns from this generation, he will convert to the purposes of the children of light. The world's wise man is ever on the watch for advancing his projects. If he contract an acquaintance of importance, his first thought is, how he may make the most of him; the Christian is equally careful to turn the acquisition of a pious friend to his own account, but with a higher view.

The mind, on the watch for improvement, will improve by the very errors of others. Virtue, our divine Master has taught us, may take some profitable lessons from vice. The activity of the fraudful steward may stimulate the negligent Christian. From the perseverance of the malignant in their patient prosecution of revenge, he may learn fortitude under discouragements and resolution under difficulties. Injuries may teach him the value of justice, may set him upon investigating its principle, and guarding against its violation. The wiliness of the designing may keep his understanding on the alert, and confirm the prudence it has excited. Temptations from without strengthen his powers of resistance; his own faults show him his own weakness, as it is foreign aggression which forms heroes, and domestic opposition which makes statesmen.

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His thirst for human applause will be abated, when he observes in those around him the unexpected attainment of popularity so soon followed by its unmerited loss. When he beholds the rapid transfer of power, it will, more than whole tomes of philosophy, show him that "favor is deceitful." He will moderate his desires of great riches, when he sees by what sacrifices they are sometimes obtained, and to what temptations the possession leads. He will be less likely to repine that others are reaching the summit of ambition, whether they achieve it by talents which he does not possess, or attain it by steps which he would not choose to climb, or maintain it by concessions which he would not care to make. The pangs of party with which he sees some of his friends convulsed, and the turbulent anxiety with which they watch the prognostics of its rise and fall, keep him sober without making him indifferent. He preserves his temper with his attachments, and his integrity with his preferences, because he is habitually watching how he may serve the state, and not how, by increasing her perplexities, he may advance himself.

The use he thus makes of the world will not carry him to the length of entangling himself in its snares. Though he maintains a necessary intercourse with men of opposite character, he will not push that intercourse further than occasion requires. He will transact business with them with frankness and civility, but he will not follow them to any objectionable lengths. He is aware, that though a wise man will never choose an infected atmosphere, yet "He who fixes our lot in life" will protect him in it in the way of duty, and will furnish an antidote to the contagion. A courageous piety doubles its caution when exposed to an impure air, but a prudent piety will never voluntarily plunge into it. It will never forget, that if the corruptions of the world are so dangerous, they are rendered so by those of our own hearts, since we carry about us a constitution disposed to infection. The true Christian will make a conscience of letting it appear, that he differs in very important points from many of those with whom business or society brings them into contact; lest, by the facility and kindness of his general behavior, they should be led into an error as to his principles. For worldly men having been accustomed to connect narrowness, reserve, and gloom, with serious piety, they might infer from his pleasant deportment and frank address, that his principles were as lax as his manners are disengaged.

He will, therefore, be careful not unnecessarily to alienate them by any thing forbidding in his exterior; he will cheer-

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fully fall in with any plan of theirs consistent with his own principles; and more especially, should it be any plan of benevolence and general utility, and one more promising than his own, he will never feel backward to promote it, through the mean fear of transferring the popularity of the measure to another. Yet he acts, nevertheless, as knowing there is no humility in a man's taking a false measure of his own understanding, and therefore does not give up his independence of mind, when the superiority of the scheme of the other does not carry conviction to his judgment. He will first clear his motive, and next his prudence in the measure, and then be as prompt in action as those who rush into it without deliberation or principle.

He keeps his ultimate end in view, even in the most ordinary concerns, and on occasions which to others may not seem likely to promote it. He knows that good-breeding will give currency to good sense; that good sense adds credit to virtue, and even helps to strip religion of its tendency to displease. By his exactness in performing the common duties of life more accurately than other men, he may lead them to look from the action up to the principle which produced it; and when they see the advantages arising from such carefulness of conduct, they may be induced to examine into the reasons; and from inquiring to adopting is not always a remote step. He may thus lead them into an insensible imitation, without the vain idea of presenting himself as a model; for he wishes them to admire, not him, but the source from which he draws both what he believes and what he is.

While he suggests hints for their benefit, he is willing they should think the suggestion their own; that they owe it to reflection, and not to instruction. Like the great Athenian philosopher, he does not so much aim to teach wisdom to others, as to put them in the way of finding it out for themselves. His piety does not lessen his urbanity, even towards those who are obviously deficient in some points which he deems of high importance. If they are useful members of the great body of society, he is the first to commend their activity, to acknowledge their amiable qualities, to do justice to their speeches or writings, while they are disconnected with dangerous or doubtful objects. On general subjects he never labors to discredit their opinions, unless they obviously stand in the way of something of more worth. But all these cheerfully allowed merits will never make him lose sight of any grand deficiency in the principle, of any thing erroneous in the tendency.

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Of his own religion he neither makes a parade nor a secret; he is of opinion that to avow his sentiments prevents mistakes, saves trouble, obviates conjectures, and maintains independence. He acknowledges them with modesty, and defends them with firmness. On other occasions, instead of shutting himself up in a close and sullen reserve, because others do not agree with him in the great cause which lies nearest his heart, he is glad that the general diffusion of knowledge has so multiplied the points at which well-educated men can have access to the minds of each other; points at which improvements in taste and science may be reciprocally communicated, the tone of conversation raised, and society rendered considerably useful, and sometimes in a high degree profitable.

But notwithstanding the clearness of his own spirit, and the intimations of an enlightened conscience, he yet carries about with him such a modest sense of his own liableness to what is wrong, as keeps up in his mind the idea that the error may possibly be on his side. This feeling, though it never makes him adopt through weakness the opinion of another, makes him always humble in the defence of his own. He opposes what is obviously bad with an earnest but sober zeal, a fervid but unboisterous warmth, a vigorous but calm perseverance.

He will not hunt for popularity; he knows that this is one of the common dangers from which even good men are not exempt; for after all, the mere good men of the world do not monopolize all credit. Highly principled and pious men form a powerful and increasing minority, which, by concord, firmness, and prudence, often makes no inconsiderable figure. When viewed collectively,

"Bright as a sun the sacred city shines."

Each individual, however, according as he contributes or may fancy he contributes to the brightness, is in danger of priding himself on the general effect. And many a weak or designing man, placing himself under the broad shelter of what he delights to call *the religious world*, limits his zeal to the credit of being accounted a member, instead of extending it to the arduous duties it imposes; and while he superciliously decries many a worthy person, who, without the pretension, performs the functions, he is as full of the world as the world is of itself. Popularity thus sought after and obtained, whether within or without the pale, even of a religious community, is of a dangerous tendency, and a truly Christian mind will alike tremble to bestow or receive the praise.

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But if the Christian character we have been faintly attempting to sketch possess a commanding station, either in fortune, rank, or talent, especially if he combine them; his character, without any assumption of his own, without any affectation of superiority, will, by its own weight, its own attraction, above all, by its consistency, be a sort of rallying point, round which the well disposed, the timid, and the young, will resort to obtain a sanction and to fortify their principles. For, if it is not the *prevailing* principle, there is yet much more piety in the world, than the pious themselves are willing to allow. If so strange a phrase may be allowed, we should almost suspect that, in a certain class, there is more good hypocrisy than bad; more who conceal their piety, than who make a display of it. Many, who are secretly and sincerely religious, want courage to avow their sentiments, want resolution to act up to them, either because the popular tide runs another way, or because they dread the imputation of singularity, and are afraid of raising a portentous cry against themselves.

The good man respects the world's opinion, without making it the leading motive of his conduct. He never provokes hostility by any arrogant intimation that he does not care what people think of him; a conduct not more offensive to others, than indicative of a self-sufficient spirit. He is careful to avoid a particular *cut*. He will not be pointed at for any trifling peculiarity. He fences in, not only his ordinary, but his best actions, with prudence, well knowing how much the manner may expose the matter to misrepresentation. He does this not merely for his own credit, but because, to a certain degree, with his reputation are involved the good of others and the honor of religion. He endeavors, as far as he can honestly do it, to remove prejudices, which an imprudent piety rather glories in augmenting, and thus widens the separation between the two classes of characters. Whereas, that which is intrinsically good should be always outwardly amiable. He, therefore, will not make his departure from the order which general usage has established observable in any of the harmless and accredited modes of life. He will not voluntarily augment that wonder which his departure from the less innocent fashions of the world must excite. The wonder will be sufficiently great, why, in stronger cases, he should subject himself to a discipline different from theirs and they will ask where is the use of aiming to be better than those whom they call good.

By the cheerful alacrity with which he performs and re

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ceives all acts of kindness, he gives the best answer to Lord Shaftesbury's character of Christianity, "that it is so taken up with the care of our future happiness, as to throw away all the present;" a sneer which is about as true as the other sarcasms of this eloquent but superficial reasoner; for if religion does call for some sacrifices of pleasure and of profit, yet every part of its practice increases our real happiness, by the augmentation of our own virtue, as much as it advances that of others; by its promotion of kindness, beneficence, good will, and good order.

He not only refuses his time and his example to scenes of luxury and dissipation; his superfluous wealth has also a higher destination; he must not, however, be expected to aim at a primitive frugality, many of the superfluities of life having, in some measure, become classed among its necessaries. The spirit of a Christian can never be a penurious spirit. His habits of living will be proportioned to his rank and fortune, taking, however, the average expenditure of many of the more discreet. He will never, even on religious grounds, by the example of parsimony, furnish the sordid with a pretence for accumulation.

He has another powerful motive for avoiding extravagance. He knows that a well-regulated economy is the only infallible source of independence. He will not, therefore, lavish in idle splendor a fortune, that he may be driven to recruit by sacrifices, which, by robbing him of his freedom, will diminish his virtue. He thinks that what Tacitus has said of a public exchequer is not less true of a private purse, that what is exhausted by profligacy must be repaired by rapacity. This incommodious rectitude will expose him to the dislike of less correct men; for, after all that has been urged against the adoption of religious doctrines, it is not so much the strictness of opinion, as of practice, which renders a man obnoxious. He may be of any religion he pleases, provided he will live like those who have none. If he be convivial and accommodating, they will not care if he worship Brama and Veeshnoo; though they would not perhaps forgive his professing the Hindoo faith, if it involved the necessity of their dining with him upon rice; nor would he be pardoned for embracing the doctrines of the Arabian prophet while the Koran continues to prohibit the use of wine.

Though pleasure is not the leading object of his pursuit, he yet finds more than those who spend their lives in pursuit of nothing else. He finds the range of innocent and elegant enjoyment sufficiently ample and attractive, without being

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driven for a resource to the disqualifying grossness of sensuality, or the relaxing allurements of dissipation. The fine arts, in all their lovely and engaging forms of beauty, the ever new delights of literature, whether wooed in its lighter graces, or sought in its more substantial attractions, the exchange

From grave to gay, from lively to severe,

shed sweet, and varied, and exhaustless charms on his leisure hours, and send him back with renewed freshness, added vigor, and increased animation to his necessary employments.

Though the strictly pious man is more exposed to temptation in the world than in retirement, yet he finds in it reasons which stimulate him to more circumspection. He is aware that he lies more open to observation, and of course to censure. As he is more observed by others, he more carefully observes himself. He watches his own faults with the same vigilance with which worldly men watch the faults of others, and for the same reason, that he may turn them to his own profit; the more he is surrounded with temptations, the more he is driven to feel his want of divine protection. If his talents or exertions are flattered, he flies more earnestly to *his* direction "from whom cometh every good and perfect gift." We appeal to the pious reader, whether he does not frequently feel more circumspect and less confident in society from which he fears deterioration, than in that on which he depends for improvement;—whether he does not feel a sort of perilous security in company, in which an expansion of heart lessens his self-distrust; and whether he has never, by leaning on the friend, looked less to Him "without whom nothing is strong, nothing is holy."

If in debate he is sometimes accused of showing too much warmth in defence of religion, while its opponent, by his superior calmness, establishes his own character for moderation and good temper, it is because it costs the latter little to manifest a coolness which is the natural effect of indifference. The man who plays for nothing needs not be moved whatever turn the game may take; while he, whose dearest interests are at stake, will not easily hide the emotion which he cannot but feel. When king Solomon decreed, as a test of affection, that the living child should be cut in pieces, the pretended mother calmly submitted to the decision. She had nothing to lose. Her hope was dead. She would enjoy seeing her competitor reduced to her own desolate state; while the real mother, who had a vital interest in the object to be

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sacrificed, was tortured at the proposal. The genuineness of the feeling betrayed the reality of the relation.

The Christian, circumstanced as we have described him, hardly dares wish for an uninterrupted, smooth and prosperous course; for, though he endeavors to sit loose to the world, every severe disappointment or privation makes him feel that he still clings too fondly to it; every trial and every loss, therefore, make him relax something of the firmness of his grasp.

Is your Christian, then, perfect? you will perhaps ask. Ask himself. With deep and sincere self-abasement he will answer in the negative. He will not only confess more failings than even his accusers ascribe to him, but he will own what they do not always charge him with—sins. He will acknowledge that there is no natural difference between himself and his censurer, but that, through divine grace, the one prays and struggles against those corruptions, the very existence of which the other does not suspect.

The peace of the confirmed Christian lies not at the mercy of events. As on the agitated ocean, storms and tempests never divert the faithful needle from its invariable object, so the distractions of the world shake not *his* confidence in him who governs it. He remembers that these winds and waves are still bearing him onward to his haven, while, on the stormy passage, they enable him to exhibit a trying but a constant evidence that God may be honored in all, even in the most unpromising, situations. Even in the worst condition, a real Christian is sure of the presence of his Maker, not only of his essential presence, which he has in common with all, but the presence of his grace; not only the sense of his being, but the support of his promise. God never appoints his servants to a difficult station, but he gives them the assurance of assistance in it, and of support under it. The solemn injunction, "Be strong and work," thrice repeated by the prophet, to reprove the dilatory builders of the second temple, was effectually enforced by the animating promise which followed it; *I will be with you.* When the disciples were sent forth by their divine Master to the grandest, but most perilous task, to which ambassadors were ever appointed, they must have sunk under the conflicts which awaited, the dangers which threatened, and the deaths which met them; but the single promise *I will be with you*, was to them strength, and light, and life. The Christian militant, though called to a milder warfare, has the same reiterated assurance; *I will be with you always, even to the end of the world.*

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CHAP. XXV.

Candidus.

CANDIDUS is a genuine son of the Reformation; but being a layman, he does not think it necessary to define his faith so constantly as some others do, by an incessant reference to the Liturgy, Articles and Homilies; though this reference would accurately express his sentiments: but, he observes, that it is become a kind of party standard equally erected by each side in intended opposition to the other, so that the equivocal ensign would not determine to which he belongs. He gives, however, the most indisputable proof of his zeal for these formularies, by the invariable conformity of his life and language to their principles.

From the warmth of his feelings, and the strength of his attachment to the church which fostered him, Candidus was once in no little danger of becoming a vehement party-man; he was, however, cured by a certain reluctance he found in his heart to undertake to hate half the world, which he found must be a necessary consequence. Observation soon taught him, that Christians would be far more likely to escape the attacks of unbelievers, if they could be brought to agree among themselves; but he saw with regret that religion, instead of being considered as a common cause, was split into factions, so that the general interest was neglected, not to say, in some instances, nearly betrayed. And while the liege subjects of the same sovereign are carrying on civil war for petty objects and inconsiderable spots of ground, that strength which should have been concentrated for the general defence, is spent in mutual skirmishes, and mischievous though unimportant hostilities; and that veneration of course forfeited, with which even the acknowledged enemy would have been compelled to behold an united church.

Candidus is, however, firm in his attachments, though not exacting in his requisitions; catholic, but not latitudinarian; tolerant, not from indifference, but principle. He contemplates with admiration the venerable fabric under whose shelter he is protected. He adheres to it, not so much from habit as affection. His adherence is the effect of conviction, otherwise his tenacity might be prejudice. It is founded in education, strengthened by reflection, and confirmed by experience. But though he contemplates our ecclesiastical insti

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tutions with filial reverence himself, he allows for the effect of education, habit and conscience in others, who do not view them with his eyes. He is sorry for those who refuse to enter into her portal; he is more sorry for those who depart out of it; but far more concerned is he for those who remain within her pale with a temper hostile to her interests, with principles foreign to her genius, with a conduct unsanctified by her spirit.

Like a true lover, he delights not to expatiate on any imperfection she may have; but he will not, like an absurd lover, insist on any imperfection as an excellence. Persuaded that a mole or a pimple is no material diminution of beauty, he will no more magnify them into a deformity than he will deny their existence. His mind is so occupied with essential points, and so satisfied with their substantial worth, that he relinquishes whatever is of no vital importance to those microscopic eyes, which, being able to take in only the diminutive, value themselves on the detection of specks, as a discovery of their own, though keener eyes had discerned them long before, but slighted them as insignificant. Satisfied that it is the best of all the churches which exist, he never troubles himself to inquire if it is the best that is possible. In the church of England he is contented with excellence, and is satisfied to wait for perfection till he is admitted a member of the church triumphant.

Candidus made early the discovery of a secret which Charles the Fifth did not discover, till by his ignorance of it he had thinned the human race—the incurable diversity of human opinions. This irremediable difference he turned to its only practical purpose, not the vain endeavor to convince others, but the less hopeless aim of improving his own forbearance. He even doubted whether this disagreement, though a misfortune in the aggregate, was not even more calculated to promote individual piety, than an uniformity which would not have called this feeling into exercise.

The more he examines Scripture, (and he is habitually examining it,) the more he is persuaded that the principles of his church are identical with the word of God; while he is enabled, by the same examination, to drink more deeply into that spirit of love, which warms his heart with kindness towards every conscientious Christian, who on some points thinks differently. His attachment is definite, but his charity knows no limits.

He observes that the loudest clamor for the Establishmen is not always raised by the most pious, nor the most affec

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tionate of her disciples; he therefore does not rejoice when he sees her honored name hoisted as a political signal by those who are careless of her spiritual prosperity; and he sometimes finds no inconsiderable difference between those who toast her, and those who study to promote her best interests; though the former obtain the reputation, which the others are only solicitous to deserve. He evinces his own affection by his zeal in defending her cause when attacked, by his prudence in never causelessly provoking the attack. Anxious that the walls of the sacred temple should be impregnable, he is still more anxious that the fires of her altars should burn with undecaying brightness; and that while her guardians are properly watching over the security of the one, the flame of the other be not extinguished. He gives the most unequivocal proof that he attends faithfully to her doctrines, by never separating them from her precepts, while he endeavors to incorporate both into his practice; adorning them by his example, recommending them in his writings, and illustrating them in his conversation.

If he produce little sensation among the intemperate, who exhibit their fidelity to the church by always representing her as on the very verge of destruction; yet he would, were the danger present, go greater lengths in her defence than some of her more declamatory champions: nay, he does more now to avert her ruin, than they who seem to make her safety depend on their clamor. If he is not perpetually predicting open war, he is watchful against the hollow security of a false peace. The most difficult but not the least important part of his care, is not more to vindicate her against avowed enemies, than against friends at once vociferous and supine.

Candidus, though a good lover, is a bad hater, and it is this defect of hatred which with a certain class brings his love into suspicion. He has observed some who evince their attachment by their virulence against what they disapprove, rather than by cultivating, in support of what is right, that spirit which is "first pure, then peaceable," and which, if it be not peaceable, is not pure. These are more remarkable for their dread of external evils, than their solicitude for the promotion of internal piety. Their religion consists rather in repulsion than attraction. On the other hand, it must be observed, that Candidus has none of that pliancy, which, in this relaxed age, obtains in a different quarter the praise of liberality from those who, thinking one religion about as good as another, are of course tolerant of any, because indifferent to all.

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He has learned from the errors of two opposite parties, that fanaticism teaches men to despise religion, and bigotry to hate it. He knows that his candor is esteemed laxity by the prejudiced, and his firmness intolerance by the irreligious. There is, however, no ambiguity in his moderation; and he never, for the sake of popularity with either party, leaves it doubtful on what ground he takes his stand. Nor does he ever renounce a right principle, because one party abuses it, or another denies its existence; and while he deprecates the assumption of *names* by impostors, it does not alter his opinion of the *things* they originally signified: for instance, he does not think patriotism is a romance, nor disinterestedness a chimera, nor fervent piety a delusion, nor charity unorthodox, nor a saint necessarily a hypocrite.

He observes among his acquaintance, that there are some who sedulously endeavor to fix the brand of fanaticism on certain doctrines, which both the Bible and the church not only recognise, but consider as fundamental, as the key-stone of the sacred arch on the strength of which our whole superstructure rests. These doctrines, while they eject them from their own creed, they confound, in the creed of others, with certain dangerous opinions, with which they are by no means necessarily connected, though they uniformly charge those who adopt the one class with invariably maintaining the other. It is in vain that the persons so charged disavow the opinions; it is to no purpose that they only desire to be allowed to know what they hold and what they reject.

Candidus, however, undaunted by clamor, and unmoved by insinuation, tenaciously maintains the doctrine of human apostasy, of salvation by grace through faith, and of the influence of the Holy Spirit in renovating the heart. In her avowal of man's corruption, he insists that the church of England is most emphatical. "Read," said he one day, in earnest conversation with one whom he could scarcely consider but as a virtual Socinian within the pale of the Establishment, "read the pointed and explicit confession with which her service opens." He holds the same language with some others to whom the church is a higher authority than the Bible, in regard to a subject next in connection with that of human weakness, namely, the agency of the Divine Spirit: he remarks that both these doctrines are recognised in every prayer and in every office; that they are especially acknowledged in the *Collects*, those brief but beautiful effusions of devotion, which, for strength of expression, condensation of the sense, and neatness of composition, not only surpass every

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thing in the age in which they were composed, but remain unrivalled in the similar addresses of our own time, whose best praise it is, that, in this period of fine writing, our petitionary forms are accounted more or less excellent, as they approach nearer, or recede farther from, those models. Read their self-abasing acknowledgments: "Thou, God, who seest that we put not our trust in any thing that we do"—"O God, forasmuch as without thee we are not able to please thee"—"Because the frailty of man without thee cannot but fall"—"Grant that we, who cannot do any thing that is good without thee, may, by thee, be enabled to live according to thy will"—"Cleanse the thoughts of our hearts by the inspiration of thy holy spirit"—"Because, through the weakness of our mortal nature, we can do no good thing without thee, grant us the help of thy grace."

But there would be no end of enumeration. The same doctrines run through and are incorporated with the whole liturgy. To get rid of them, mere omissions would be altogether insufficient; we must tear up the whole web, we must weave another, we must weave it too with new materials; for the old threads would retain the color of the old doctrines, and communicate the original character to the new piece; it is not only the old form that must be new cast, but new principles that must be infused, a new train of sentiments that must be adopted, in short, a new religion that must be substituted.

Candidus observes, that it is a proof how different the views of some of our contemporaries are on this subject from those of the primitive church, that while, with some of the former, divine influence is a theme of derision rather than of reverence; in the other, whatever was pure and holy, was ascribed to its operation. At the same time, being a diligent reader of ecclesiastical history, as well as an accurate observer of what passes before his eyes, he is aware what abuses have been and are still practised, and what deceits carried on, under pretence of being *the work of the spirit*. The importance of the doctrine accounts for the imitations and counterfeits to which it is exposed; and he knows that the abuse of a thing is always pernicious in proportion to its excellence. The Old and New Testament abound with instances. To those of the former St. Peter reverts, to guard his converts from those of the latter,—"There were false prophets among the people, even as there shall be false teachers among you." Another apostle warns his hearers against the mischiefs which he himself had seen produced by these impious pretenders,

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by instructing them to "try the spirits, whether they be of God." Hence Candidus advises, with an able divine,* to try the spirits ourselves, not by putting them upon supernatural work, but to try them by a more infallible rule—by the doctrine they teach, that is, by its invariable conformity with Scripture. He thinks the same rule and the same necessity subsist now, in as full force, as when the injunction was given.

Candidus is aware that it is necessary, not only to be accurate in the use of his own terms, but to be on his guard against being misled by the inaccuracy of the terms employed by others. He therefore takes care to ascertain the character and temper of the man by whom any ambiguous term is used, as well as of him to whom the term is applied; without this caution he could not decide on the justness of the application. Even the founder of the Epicurean sect could say, *a man cannot live happily without living wisely.* Now, though every man, whatever be his principles, must assent to this truth as a general proposition, yet the phrase, "living wisely," conveyed a very different idea in the school of an atheistical philosopher, to what it would have conveyed in the follower of Zeno, and more especially in the disciple of Christ. Enthusiasm is one of these ambiguous terms.

Candidus is prudent on a principle which is sometimes denied. He considers that prudence is, in an ardent character, more likely to be an effect of grace than even zeal; because in the exercise of zeal he is indulging his natural temper, whereas in the other case he is subduing it; and he has found that to resist a propensity is generally more the effect of principle than to gratify it. Hence, he infers that if resistance be a work of grace, the sluggish and the cold-hearted may judge of their own conquest over nature by a superinduced zeal, while he presumes *he* is conquering his own vehemence by a superinduced prudence; thus the same truth is illustrated by directly opposite instances.

Against enthusiasm, therefore, it is unnecessary to caution the discreet and enlightened Candidus. He avoids it as naturally as a wise man avoids folly, as a sober man shuns extravagance. But then it is the thing itself, and not what bigots call so; it is the real entity, and not the spectre, against which he is on his guard; for, not being superstitious, he is not terrified by phantoms and goblins. He laments when he encounters a real enthusiast, because he knows that, even if honest, he is pernicious. But though he thinks him highly

* Dr. Owen.

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blamable, he does not think him worse "than murderers of fathers, and murderers of mothers." He thinks enthusiasm mischievous, but he does not think it worse than impiety, worse than intemperance, worse than infidelity, worse than intolerance, worse than any other flagitious vice; especially he does not think it worse than all the other vices put together. Yet this he might be almost tempted to believe was the case, when he sees other vices comparatively left to enjoy themselves, and this doughty enormity, imaginary as well as real, singly attacked with the combined force of all the weapons which ought to be in turn applied to the whole family of sin. As he is very skilful in symptoms, he takes care to ascertain evident marks of the mania, palpable diagnostics of the rabid bite, before he pronounces on the disease, or proceeds to secure himself from the contagion.

By his well-exercised judgment, he can generally discover the different causes of the actual distemper. He can distinguish whether the patient is sick of a deluded imagination, or from having been in contact with the infected; whether he is mismanaged by artful, or injured by ignorant prescribers; whether the malady lies in the weakness of his natural powers, the agitation of his animal spirits, or the vanity of his mind—whether it be an inflammation on the brain, or a tumor in the heart—some or all of these appearances commonly indicating the fanatical fever. In either case, he heartily subscribes to the reality and danger of the distemper, but even then he does not positively pronounce that the weak are wicked, or the disordered counterfeits.

But if, as is not seldom the case, he finds the appellation conferred only because the objects of it are deeply sensible of the unspeakable importance of religion, and the infinite value of eternal things—because they are no more afraid of feeling than of understanding the great truths of Christianity—because they think their souls are not a property to be complimented away through fear: if he find, that with all their warmth they are rational, with all their zeal they are humble, with all their energy they are consistent, with all their spirituality they are sober; if they obey the precepts of the gospel as faithfully as they believe its doctrines—if their religion do not lie more in profession than in performance—if they give a striking evidence of their love of God, by their tenderness to their fellow-creatures—if they are as liberal to their bodily wants as those are who forget to take their souls into the account—if their piety appear as much in their practice as in their discourse, and their prudence keep pace

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with their earnestness, then he will not be forward to impute to them, as the unpardonable sin, those animated sentiments which are to themselves "peace and joy in believing," and to others benignity, philanthropy, and kindness.

And as he does not call well-directed zeal fanaticism, nor generous ardor delirium, so he does not rank those who believe in the omnipotence of divine grace among the enemies to virtuous action; nor does he suspect that the advocates for strenuous exertion are sworn foes to faith. Nor does he ever disavow a doctrine, which he has adopted on conviction, because it may happen to be associated in the mind of another man with other doctrines which he himself cannot adopt. And as he knows something of the internal constitution of the human heart and the nature of religious affections, he distinguishes between the sanguine temper of youth, between that warmth which, in a rightly turned mind, time will cool, and experience temper, and which will retain no more than a due degree of spirit, when its first effervescence has subsided; he distinguishes this spirit from that blind zeal and headlong violence, which, as they are a part of no religion, so they are a discredit to any.

He has observed, that the reason why we see such misshapen representations of religion set up for the finger of reproach or ridicule to point at, is, that the reviler has not been looking out for truth; he has not taken his draught, we will not say from the highest model, but from the fair average of serious Christians; but he has taken it from the lowest specimen of what he has seen, and even more commonly from the distorted report of others. He was looking out for absurdity, and where it is studiously sought, it will not be difficult to find; and, if not found, it will be easily imagined. This caricature he produces as the representative of the whole body; taking care, however, to preserve in his portrait just resemblance enough to show a feature or two of the real face, that the disgusting and exaggerated physiognomy may not prevent its being recognised. If no glimpse of likeness could be traced, it would not answer the end; it would answer it still less, if the prevailing character of the piece were not deformity.

Candidus is persuaded that, of every combination of wickedness with folly which Satan has devised, hypocrisy is the greatest, as being the most generally unprofitable. The hypocrite is sure of being the abhorrence of both sides of the question. Where his duplicity is not suspected, the world hates him for the *appearance* of piety; God, who knows the

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heart, hates him for the abuse and the affectation of it. But, though Candidus deprecates hypocrisy, he is cautious of suspecting it on light grounds, still more of charging it home without proof. As he is not omniscient, he cannot be quite sure that any man who appears more than usually pious *is* a hypocrite, nor does he so denominate him on that single ground. As he cannot scrutinize his heart, he judges him by his actions, and leaves him to settle his motives with his Maker.

On the whole, if he meet with a man, the consistency of whose life gives stronger evidence of the reality and depth of his religion than other men, he is reluctant in suspecting him either of hypocrisy or enthusiasm. So far from it, he will find his own faith strengthened, his own victory over the world confirmed, his own indifference to human applause increased, by such a living exemplification of the truth of Christianity, and calmly leave it to the inconsiderate, the incompetent, and the malevolent, to stigmatize the character which he reveres.

They who, when they observe eminent piety and zeal much above low-water mark, insinuate that such symptoms in the more animated Christian prove his tendency to be a separatist, pay a very wretched compliment to the established church. Is it not implying, that her service is not sufficiently high and enlarged to satisfy an energetic spirit; that she does not possess attractions to engage, and materials to fill, and spirit to warm a devout mind, but that a superior degree of earnestness will be in danger of driving its possessor to stray without her pale in search of richer pastures? Is it not virtually saying one of two things, either that a fervent piety is bad, or that the church is not good.

With Candidus, this is so far from being the case, he is so little "given to change," that he rejoices in belonging to a church of whose formularies we have already seen how much he had to say in commendation. In these standards he rejoices to see truth, as it were, pinned down, hedged in, and, as far as is possible, in this mutable world, preserved and perpetuated. Her significant and spiritual ordinances, and the large infusion of Scripture in her offices and liturgy, secure her from the fluctuations of human opinion; so that, if ever the principles of any of her ministers should degenerate, her service would be protected from the vicissitude. No sentiments but those of her prescribed ritual can ever find their way into the desk, and the desk will always be a safe and

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permanent standard for the pulpit itself, as well as a test by which others may ascertain its purity.

He values her government for the same reason for which he values her liturgy, because it gives a definite bound to the inclosure, never forgetting that the fruit inclosed is of deeper importance than the fence which incloses. He always remembers, however, that, at no very remote period, when the hedge was broken down, disorder and misrule overspread the fair vineyard.

Among other doctrines, he is an accurate studier of the doctrine of proportions, in whatever regards the ecclesiastical institution. Though he cordially approves her forms and discipline, though he believes they are not only essential to her dignity, but necessary to her existence, yet he discriminates between what is subordinate and what is supreme. If the one is the body, the other is the soul. It is to her strenuously maintaining the doctrines of the New Testament, that he looks for her preservation. This is her palladium. Nor does it more resemble the fabled statue of Ilium, because, like that, it fell from heaven to earth, than in its having dropped down *while the prince was building the citadel.*

If he adopt the liturgy for his model, it is because he perceives how completely she has adopted the Bible for hers, in never giving undue prominence to one doctrine to the disparagement of the rest; like *her* he appreciates and settles them according to their due degrees of importance.

Among his many reasons for venerating the church of England, the principal is, that she is an integral and distinguished portion of the church of Christ. In the specific, he never loses sight of the generic character; as a churchman, he is first a Christian, and a Protestant. The ramification, so far from separating him from the root, unites him more closely to it. If he bear much fruit, it is because he is inserted into the true vine. Though quick-sighted to what he conceives to be the errors, he does liberal justice to whatever is valuable in other communities. In many members of those which differ from his own more in forms of government than in any of the essentials of doctrine, he sees powerful ability and sound learning to admire, and much substantial piety to venerate. Even with regard to that church, from the corruptions and spiritual tyranny of which our own has been providentially rescued, he acknowledges much excellence in those missals from which our own ritual was partly extracted; he sees in many of her writers a genius, a sublimity, and an unction, that have rarely been supassed. In short, he exer-

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cises charity and kindness to all sects and all parties, except one, a sect which has lately been well animadverted on. It is not, indeed, a distinct sect; it is not a separate community, for then his prudence might escape all contact with it; but it is one, whose sloth, producing the same insinuating effect which the subtlety of the Jesuits formerly produced, without giving us, like the school of Loyola, any hope of its extinction, has found means to thrust not a few of its followers into every religious denomination and society in the world—the sect of the *non-doers*.

In these worst of sectaries, no vaunting profession of faith, no flaming display of orthodoxy, no clamor for favorite, no hostility against reprobated, doctrines, no outcry for or against the church or the state, will ever raise them in his estimation. He accounts them the barren fig-tree of every community in whose soil they spring up. They may, indeed, claim to belong to it, but it is as the worm belongs to the root, the canker to the bud, the excrescence to the healthful body.

In the constitution of the established church, Candidus approves the degrees of rank and dignity, and the gradations of income. But, if he never entertains a desire that the highest were lower, he cannot help breathing a cordial wish that the lowest were higher. Convinced, however, that every thing human is in its very nature imperfect, he consoles himself with the hope, a hope which is confirmed by actual instances, that some of the most highly endowed will be examples of Christian liberality, and some of the most lowly, of patient submission; so that their several portions may, while they enable them to furnish a pattern to others, minister to their own eternal good.

But evils which he cannot remove, he will never aggravate. He holds it criminal even to agitate questions which only fester and inflame the wounds they are meant to cure: he knows that fruitless discussion may irritate, but seldom heals; that querulous animadversions on irremediable grievances only serve, by stirring up discontent, to excite insubordination.

He respects every order and degree among them for the Lord's sake; and if a case should occur in which he cannot honor the man, he will honor his office. If called on for his opinion as to any defect, his censures are discreet; if not called upon, he is silent. But if his censures, when just, are temperate, his commendations, when merited, are cordial. Above all, he holds the practice to be equally dishonest, disingenuous and vulgar, to make communities and bodies

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answerable for the faults and errors of individuals; while he never commends or vindicates any thing decidedly wrong either in individuals or in communities.

CHAP. XXVI.

The established Christian.

We have it on the authority of a fine writer, that, *not to know what occurred before we were born, is to be always a child.* Yet while the intellect may be improved to the highest pitch by this antecedent knowledge, the will and the passions may, notwithstanding our study of the most elaborate discussions on their nature and effects, remain in the same state of childish imbecility. History and philosophy, though they inform the understanding, and assist the judgment, cannot rectify the obliquities of the heart.

The experience of all past ages has produced such an accumulated mass of disappointment, such a long unbroken series of mortification, such a reiterated conviction of the emptiness of this world, and of the insufficiency of its power to confer happiness, that one would be ready to imagine, that to every fresh generation, nay, to every period of the life of every individual in every generation, wisdom would not have all her admonitions to begin over again. One would not think that the same truths require, not only to be afresh pressed upon us, but to be again unfolded; to be repeated as if all previous experiment had never been tried, as if all foregoing admonition had either never been given, or had been completely obliterated; as if the world were about to begin on a fresh stock of materials, to set out on an untried set of principles, as if it were about to enter on an original course of action of which preceding ages had left no precedent; on a line of conduct of which our forefathers had bequeathed no instances of failure, had experienced no defeat of expectation.

We read perpetually of multitudes, who lived in the long indulgence of unbounded appetite, who in the gratification of every desire had drained the world to its last dregs; but does the narrative of ages record a single instance, that the end proposed and followed up in the fervent pursuit, I mean happiness, was ever attained? We contemplate these recorded examples, we lament the disgusts, and pity the mortifications of the disappointed; but who applies the knowledge

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to any practical use, to any personal purpose? We are informed, but we are not instructed. We resolve, in full confidence of our own wisdom, and complete contempt for that of our predecessors, to make the experiment for ourselves. We, too, pursue the same end, and probably by the same path; secure that we shall escape the mistakes into which others have fallen, assured that we shall avoid the evils which they have incurred, evils which we attribute to their ignorance, or their neglect, to their error, or their indiscretion.

We set out fresh adventurers in the old tract. We weary our wits, we waste our fortune, we exhaust our spirits. Still we are persuaded that *we* have devised the expedient of which our precursors were ignorant; that *we* have hit on the very discovery which had eluded their search; that *we* have found the ingredient, which they, in mixing up the grand compound, earthly happiness, had overlooked.

The natural and pressing object of our desire is present enjoyment; those, therefore, who gratify our wayward fancies, or remove from us any immediate inconvenience, are sure of our favor. On them we seize as instruments for promoting our schemes of gratification, forgetting that they have schemes of their own to promote; that they are equally looking to us for our instrumentality; and that, if they are making any undue sacrifices to us, it is but in order to the furtherance of those schemes. Such is mere worldly friendship. As the intellectual eye seldom runs along the whole train of consequences, which is the only true way of taking our measure of things, the same principle which attaches us to the friend who is humoring us, makes us murmur at the dispensations of Him who is correcting us, dispensations which, though painful at the moment, may, by a train of circumstances of which we know neither the design nor the process, be insuring to us future benefits. But having no clear perception of remote good, we have no very ardent desires after it. Our short-sightedness concurs with our selfishness in making this false estimate.

Divine goodness, which we perhaps have hitherto withstood, at length, when He who gives the grace gives the desire, touches the heart so long closed against it. The still small voice which was drowned in the noise and tumult of the world is at length heard, and, through longer forbearance, and farther communications of that grace, is at length obeyed. Religion operating on the convictions of the heart, and our humility improving with the experience of our own mistakes, gradually remove the veil through which we had hitherto beheld the world.

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As the heavenly light grows stronger, the false lights, drawn from the exhalations of sensuality and self-indulgence, which at once glimmer and mislead, are quenched. The day-star begins to dawn. In this clearer atmosphere, objects assume their proper shape; every thing appears in its true colors. The mind is insensibly disenchanted, the views take another turn. As the eye attains a more distinct sight, the desires acquire a juster aim. We discover that the best things on earth have an inseparable imperfection appended to them. Referring to our past experience, or present clearer observation of things, we find that the delights which we fancied were indefectible are dying away; we find that pleasure dissolves, wit misleads, riches corrupt, power intoxicates, hope deceives, possession disappoints;—and, which now stamps upon our renewed feelings the deepest impression of the vanity of human things, difficulties sink our spirits, success agitates them: we find that what we want, we desire with a painful ardency; what we have, we either fear to enjoy, or the enjoyment is poisoned by the fear of losing it; and that intense delight could not long be borne even if it could be obtained. The convictions of the Christian being settled, he is now desirous of imparting the benefits of his own experience to his younger friends, who, in their turn, commonly reject the transfer, thinking him to be as much mistaken as he had formerly thought his predecessors; like him, they prefer the experiment to the advice, the risk to the caution.

The sober thinker is now convinced, that between the fever of desire, the uncertainty of attainment, the disappointment attending what is attained, the alternation of hope and fear, the dread of the worst things, and the insuppressible sense of the brevity of the best, the mere man of the world can never be substantially happy. The Christian thus warned, thus wakened, is thankful, not for the mistakes he has committed, but for the salutary vexations that have attended them. The monitory wisdom of past ages rises in his esteem, in the same proportion as his own sinks. Above all, he has found that there is no infallible wisdom but in the oracles of inspiration; there he looks for whatever is "profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness." There only he has found, that the "man of God may be thoroughly furnished unto all good works."

In perusing the sacred records, he even derives consolation from what has been a source of derision to the profane, and of wonder to the ignorant—the fidelity with which the in-

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spired writers have exhibited holy men, in the most censurable instances of their conduct, and in the lowest stages of their hope and confidence. He there beholds the chosen servants of God wading through doubts and apprehensions, assaulted by temptations, perplexed by trials. Had they never been presented but in their happier seasons, but in their triumphs, and their victories, the comparison with his own failures, with his own occasional depressions and fluctuations, would have sunk his spirits which they now support, would have weakened his faith which they now confirm.

He rejoices in the gospel as a stream flowing from the fountain of love and mercy, the spring of all spiritual life and motion: he finds that genuine Christianity differs from every other good, as spirit differs from matter. It establishes the foundation of happiness as well as goodness; and both, not on any supposed merit in the recipient, but on the free mercy and voluntary grace of God. While it exacts obedience to the divine law, it shows that the requisition connot be complied with but by divine assistance; what it commands it bestows; if it requires the will, it confers the power.

In the retrospect of his past life, he is astonished at the patience and forbearance of God under his own repeated provocations; especially he reflects with wonder, that the very prosperity which had been the special gift of his Maker, had alienated his heart from him. He is humbled to think, that it was in the very arms of his goodness he forgot him; when he tasted most abundantly of his bounty, then it was he neglected him most; when he most largely enjoyed his overflowing beneficence, the gift induced not gratitude, but intoxication. He looks back with remorse on the time he has wasted, and the errors he has committed, but he does not spend his remaining strength so much in regretting as in repairing them.

To be enchanted with things which have not much in them, he now finds is the mark of a weak and undistinguishing mind. It shows the absence of a rational understanding, and the want of a manly spirit, to be inordinately attached to any object, whose worth will not bear out our judgment, and vindicate our attachment. Habitual considerations on the littleness of present things, the disappointing nature of all earthly enjoyments, the grandeur of his future prospects, with nearer views of the eternal world, all combine to give continence to his mind, moderation to his desires, and sobriety to his conduct.

We are slow in making the discovery of the large capacity

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of the human mind; that it is made capable of a felicity commensurate to its nature; that the rudiments, both of eternal misery and happiness, are laid in our souls here. Being endued with such faculties and powers for seeking the favor of God, and such means and graces for attaining to his presence, the Christian finds that the misery must be proportionate in missing it. He has also learned, that it is not the design of the gospel merely to announce to us a state of future blessedness, but to fit us for it. It is but half the work of infinite love to provide a heaven for man; it is its completion to make man a suitable recipient of the bliss prepared for him. Without this gracious provision, Christianity had been a scheme to tantalize, and not to save us. He sees that there is a higher destination for the passions than that to which he has hitherto applied them. Those affections which had been parcelled out, and severally fastened on their respective vanities, are now concentrated and devoted to God. Love, joy, hope, desire, the very propensities which have formerly misled him, having found their true object, now ripen him for that state from which they had long seduced him; each contributes its quota towards framing him into a disposition for happiness, and to prepare him for its ultimate enjoyment.

He has long since discovered that the best pleasures of earth are drawn from cisterns, not fountains, that our most prized delights are neither pure in themselves, nor permanent in their duration. The immortal mind cannot be satisfied in the pursuit, nor even in the enjoyment. They cannot confer what they do not possess, perfection and stability. Things perishable themselves cannot satisfy the desires of beings made for eternity. The soul cannot exert its full powers, nor unfold its whole nature, nor display all its operations on this contracted stage. "The bed is narrower than that a man can stretch himself on it." There is no proportion between such a scanty space and such large capabilities, such trivial pleasures and such boundless desires, such a fleeting duration and a spirit formed for immortality.

He has found that it is of pressing necessity that this futurity be a happy one, otherwise the very circumstance that it is endless, which makes the happiness complete, turns against us, and makes the consummation of our misery. It is difficult to say whether the shortness of the time allotted us to secure this futurity, or the eternity of the state to be secured, should most stimulate our religious exertions. We have frequently spoken of the duty of learning of an enemy; here the lesson is peculiarly awakening. The reason as-

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signed in the vision of St. John why the *great* enemy is working with such powerful energy, is, because *the time is short*. Shall we be equally assured of the brevity of our own time, and yet be less active in securing our salvation, than he is in promoting our destruction.

The boundlessness of the divine perfections presents to the soul the widest range for the exercise of faith and love, and the gospel teaches the most unshaken confidence of happiness in the death of Christ. But that God is the King, *eternal and immortal*, is to us the broad basis on which all the rest of the promises are built. It would moderate the delight with which we consider his attributes, if eternity were not annexed to them; his immortality alone being the pledge and security of ours. "The weight of glory" announced by the apostle derives its highest value from its being an *eternal* weight.

Of the joys of heaven there is in Scripture no description. This is wisely avoided, as the tastes, desires, and inclinations of men are so different, one conceiving that to be of the very essence of happiness for which another has little relish. They are intimated by negatives, or by shadows, figures, and images of things, to which a general idea of enjoyment is annexed. There is only one idea respecting heaven which is clear, and plain, and definite—its *eternity*. Of duration every man has some precision in his ideas. Other delineations might have led to dispute; but if the different notions of the nature of happiness might have kindled debate, about its immortality there can be but one opinion. Perpetuity gives the finishing stamp to perfection.

And as we frame our ideas of eternity from what we know of duration, so we frame our faint notions of God from what we conceive of goodness. We meditate on the excellences of the highest created spirits and then imagine something of God, though inconceivably elevated above that poor conception, yet not contradictory to it. We fill our mind with the idea of wisdom, goodness, knowledge, power, holiness, justice, purity, and to each of these attributes we prefix that of infinite; never forgetting that God is almost as much above our excellences as our weaknesses. Yet we can but ascribe to him all that we feel or can imagine of perfection, and we should be still more lost in the mere abstract notion, if we had not some sensible feelings, though infinitely imperfect, derived from reality and exemplification.

The Christian must fill his vocation to the last. In this or that profession men are looking forward to the period when

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they may lay it down with safety and honor; the Christian's safety and honor consist in his carrying it on to the end. But there is between them this point of agreement. The man of business contracts his schemes, diminishes his labors, mitigates his activity, all with a view to his ultimate repose. If the religious man act thus, he does it with another view, and to a higher end. If he seek rest from his toils, it is in order to find a surer rest in God; if he contract his schemes, it is that he may enlarge his views. There is no specific period in which he can say, My work is done, till he lies down in the grave, where no man can work. He now finds that the tranquillity of his occupations, the beauties of nature, the peaceful pleasures of retirement, pleasures the most natural and congenial to the mind of unsophisticated man, would still be too little to fill his desires; that they would leave a melancholy void in his heart, without the sense of *his* presence whose gift they are. While a consciousness both of the presence and favor of God gives a relish to every enjoyment, and heightens even common comforts into blessings.

There is a progression in the habits of a Christian. In the advancement of his course his pursuits are probably slower, but his interruptions are fewer. If his progress be even less obvious, less apparently active, he is perhaps more substantially improving, more spiritually advancing. When, from the infirmities of declining life, he may seem to be doing nothing, he may then be doing most. If he is able to look less abroad, he is looking more within. He begins to taste more of the fruits of that victory which the apostle describes as the evidence of a renovated heart; to give this best proof that he is "born of God," "he overcometh the world." This, if one of his latest, is one of his most important conquests. But though he has turned away his eyes from the world, because it never satisfied the desires of his heart, he endeavors to the last to serve it with much more sedulity than when he looked to it for his happiness.

He has long been persuaded, that even in this present low state of being, we must attain something of the rudiments of future happiness. He has learned that the first principles must be formed now, which are to have their consummation in heaven. To look forward to the completion of a state and character, of which we have not so much as begun to acquire the elements, is not acting according to any of the analogies of common life. The beginning and the process of any thing we have in contemplation always partake in an inferior, but still in a similar and progressive measure, of the nature of

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the end. It has the same properties and tendencies, in its initial state, with that which is hereafter to be completed. We must begin to lay in our hearts the foundation both of the knowledge and love of God, if we would hereafter attain to that perfection in both, which we are told is of the essence of the heavenly happiness.

He has long found that there is no peace to the mind that does not entertain some one ultimate end. Broken views and mixed designs distract its attention, and corrode its quiet. In most of the enterprises of life, a man, besides being absorbed by present and perhaps opposing schemes, is looking anxiously forward to some point of change. He has no sooner framed one project, but his views are penetrating to something beyond it; something which he shall adopt as soon as he shall have accomplished all his proximate objects. Thus the projecting, the fluctuating, and prospective mind, is never at rest. There is no stability but in God. No grand aim, no fixed position, no ultimate end, but in him. He who has once chosen his Redeemer for his portion, is subject to no more vicissitudes; has no after reference, no remoter pursuit, no further design in reserve.

He, however, who makes heaven his aim, and God his end, will not therefore live idly, as if his choice being decided, his object being settled, he had nothing more to do. His object is indeed fixed, his choice is irreversibly determined, his portion is unalterably decided; but that which elevates his desires also enlarges his capacities, so that his pursuit never ceases, his search is never finished; nor ever can be, unless the perfections of its object could be exhausted. Mr. Boyle observes of a certain mineral, that a man may consume his whole life in the study of it, without ever arriving at the knowledge of all its properties. How much more shall he who seeks to "acquaint himself with God," find that his entire life is too short, his whole powers to small, to find out the Almighty to perfection! This he will never completely accomplish on earth, yet his desires will grow with his attainments.

But as the happiness of a Christian is chiefly in prospect, he joyfully looks forward to its glorious consummation in a better world. "When I awake up after thy likeness I shall be satisfied," a plain intimation that till then we shall not be satisfied. From different passages of Scripture, we collect that the happiness of heaven consists in seeing God, in participating his likeness, in being satisfied with it. But how shall this blessedness be perfected hereafter, if the desire, if

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the endeavor, does not originate here? If there be no preliminary acquaintance begun with him who ransomed us with his blood, can we expect to dwell with him in eternal glory? "Not to know God" is the portentous omen of being "punished with everlasting destruction from his presence." It is unspeakably distressing to apprehend, that this may possibly be the awful description of some, who are by no means destitute of credit or character; who go on without ever entertaining a conception, that such a beginning may be connected with such an end.

All the delineations of future misery, all the pictures of a disturbed imagination, all the terrors with which a restless conscience anticipates its torments, all the accumulated images by which Revelation describes it, whether under the figure of the fire that is never quenched, or the worm that never dies, are but inferior degrees of this terrible climax, "everlasting destruction from the presence of the Lord!" All the doleful conceptions of unimaginable woe, all the shades and shapes of substantial, unutterable wretchedness, are comprised in this hopeless, ever-during exile. What the soul suffers there is no attempt to describe, what it loses is but faintly presented to the imagination. On the other hand, "eye hath not seen nor ear heard, nor hath the heart of man conceived," the final state of bliss. And it is observable that the two extremes are both most emphatically conveyed by negatives. We are only assured that assimilation with God is the perfection of joy, banishment from his presence the extremity of woe.

There is nothing that more humbles and abases the established Christian, than that, whilst in his happier moments, he is able to figure to himself a cheering image of the glory of the Redeemer, the blessedness of the redeemed, the beauty of Christian perfection; to feel himself not only awakened, but exalted, not merely enlightened, but kindled, almost possessing, rather than anticipating, heaven; while he is enabled, in a joyful measure, to meditate upon these things, to feel his mind ennobled and his soul expanded by the contemplation, yet to find how soon the bright ideas fade, the strong impression is effaced, the heavenly vision vanished; he mourns to reflect, that he does not more abidingly possess in his heart, that he does not more powerfully exhibit in his conversation, more forcibly display in his life, that spirit of which his heart was lately so full, of which his mind was so enamored. Cast down by these reflections, he still learns—painful lesson!—that "those *must* sow in tears who would reap

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in joy;" that it is not expectation, but possession, which excludes all sense of sorrow; that it is heaven itself, and not the promise of it, that is to "wipe all tears from our eyes." His happiness in this life will, on these accounts, be as far below perfection, as his goodness; and when we speak of his joy and felicity, it must be understood rather of a comparative, than an absolute happiness. It is the joy of hope rendered sure by faith. The soul will not be completely blessed till the body is disanimated, its temptations removed, and its infirmities at an end.

The Christian, as life wears away, must not be discouraged, if he feel not always those fervors, which once appeared to him inseparable from real piety. It is not, perhaps, that his piety is less sincere, but that years and infirmity, which have impaired his natural energy of character, may affect or seem to affect the liveliness of his devotion; but it may be mellowed, without being decayed; he will not too much distress himself by mistaking that for a diminution of grace, which may be only a wearing out of nature. Or it may be that the principle, which is become habitual, may not for that very reason strike the mind so forcibly as on its more early adoption, yet it may have sunk deeper into his heart. There may be more *proportion* in his religion; all its component parts may be more balanced; there is more evenness in his character; more virtues, but of a less ostensible kind, are collected into it than he formerly thought necessary. His piety is at once more solid, and more spiritual, more operative, yet more serene. His principles have somewhat of a different call for their exercise; the efforts he formerly made to resist temptations of a bolder character, are now exerted to repel the incursions of peevishness, the allurements of indolence, the murmurs of impatience. Qualities which he once relinquished to the unconverted, as thinking them merely natural, he now carefully cherishes. Cheerfulness, once considered as the mere flow of animal spirits, is cultivated as a Christian grace; for it does not now spring from nature, but triumphs over it.

He is not so eager in support of some particular opinions as formerly, because each doctrine now maintains its proper place and due importance in his mind. If he make religion less a subject of discussion, he trusts it is become a more practical principle. His views are more deep, his judgment more just, his convictions more firmly rooted. There is a finer edge to his virtues, for they are now sheathed in humility; and this quality, the crowning point, and soundest

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evidence of a renovated mind, by rendering him more distrustful of himself, more candid in his opinions, and more temperate in his language, will have checked that forwardness of debate, rashness of decision and impatience with error, which, with the less enlightened, might formerly have given him the appearance of a more animated Christian.

But the more his character improves, the more he looks out of himself for his final happiness. His trust in his Redeemer increases in exact proportion to those virtues of which that trust is the source, virtues on which too many others invite him to rest his dependence.

Some Christians, in their outset, are disposed to lay an almost exclusive stress on duties, without sufficiently cultivating the spirit which should prompt them; others too much overlook duties, relying on certain fervors for supplying their place. The established Christian is careful never to relax in duties, even though they are not attended with that energy which once gave more animation to the exercise. There may be in them a less sensible acting of the affections, which are naturally more alive in the active season of life, yet without any diminution of the real principle of piety; there will be rather an increased devotedness, an augmented acquiescence of the will, a more complete consecration of heart and spirit, to the only legitimate object of their entire affection.

He will, however, be solicitous, that if the flame emit not such vivid flashes as when it was first lighted, yet that it shall burn more steadily, more equably; especially will he be vigilant, that he do not insensibly transfer to other objects that ardor which used to give life and spirit to his piety, and that while he fears he is not so much alive to God, it is because he is more alive to the world. Though others cannot fairly judge of his internal state, yet there is this sure test by which he will judge himself: if the natural tempers be not more subdued, if the irascible passions retain their vehemence, if pride and selfishness maintain their sway, while the religious feelings alone are grown obtuse, it is an alarming symptom, a plain intimation that religion has indeed lost, or rather, it is to be feared, that it never had obtained the supreme place in his heart.

And as he has observed, that in some vehement characters the lamp of religious fervor was first kindled by the fire of natural passions, so its flame declines with the declension of the natural powers; he is also aware, that there is a possibility to the Christian, as he advances in years, of a growing

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supineness, the too natural effect of which is a decay of the vital spirit of religion. This makes him tremble when he reflects that the same awful warning which, in the vision of the Apocalypse, "the spirit gives to the churches," is addressed with equal emphasis to every individual Christian. He remembers that this compassionate spirit, which succors us when tempted, strengthens us when persecuted, intercedes for us when afflicted, has promised no such soothing tenderness under declining piety. His language to the decaying Christian, as well as to the lukewarm church, is that of alarming menace. This gradual apostasy is the only case, because it is a hopeless one, in which he threatens final rejection. It is, indeed, infinitely grievous, when they, whom this blessed spirit has enlightened, in whom he has excited devout dispositions and holy tempers, visibly sink below the state in which they once stood. In the volume of inspiration, every complaint, every expostulation, every argument which long-suffering goodness could suggest, every entreaty which insulted mercy could devise, is exhausted; nothing is omitted which can invigorate relaxing principle, nothing is neglected which can reanimate decaying piety.

The advanced Christian, therefore, will guard against the too natural delusion of imposing on himself the belief, that a declension in spiritual vigor is only natural decay. But he will guard against it, by watching its sensible and visible effects. He will discern, whether he sets less value on the things which are passing away; whether his attachment to the world diminishes, while his prayers for its prosperity and improvement increase; whether he is as zealous in promoting good works by his purse and his influence, as he was, in the days of health and strength, by his personal exertions.

The confirmed Christian exemplifies the emphatical description of the good man in Scripture, "he *walks* with God." He does not merely approach him at stated times; he does not ceremoniously address him on great occasions only, and then retreat, and dwell at a distance; but he *walks* with him; his habitual intercourse, his natural motion, his daily converse, his intimate communication, is with his Redeemer: and he remembers that walking not only implies intercourse, but progress. His graces, if not more sincere, are more universal; he knows and he endeavors to act upon the knowledge, that a Christian must be holy in "*all manner* of conversation;" that excellences in some part of his character will not atone for allowed defects in any.

In the still remaining varieties of this changing scene, not

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knowing to what particular trials he may yet be called, he will have endeavored to bring a general preparedness of spirit to every event. When he can no longer *do* the will of God by his accustomed exertions, he can, with a submission which is worn into a habit, *suffer* it. That which is the crime of an ordinary man, is his highest attainment. *He can submit to be useless.* He will cheerfully resign himself to be discharged from services, in which his former happiness had consisted. He will contentedly see himself laid by, though still stout in heart, and firm in spirit. He will kindly assist those who are rising up to fill the place which he is about to leave vacant, by his counsel, his experience, his prayers. He can rejoice, that though the servant fails, the service is and will be supplied.

He will continue more assiduously to labor after that consistency of character which is a more unequivocal evidence of high Christian attainment, than the most prominent great qualities, which are frequently counteracted by their opposites. This consistency exhibits a more striking conformity to the image of his Maker; as in the works of creation, the wisdom of the Supreme Intelligence is more admirable in the agreement and harmony of one thing with another, than in the individual beauty and excellence of each. It is more conspicuous in the fitness and proportion of its parts relatively, than in the composition of the parts themselves. By this uniformity, the results of religion are the most beautifully exhibited in the Christian character.

And as a real Christian is, allowing for human infirmity, consistent with himself; so the same consistency is discoverable in the general features of all Christians. However men may differ in their natural character, yet there is, in all true believers, a sort of correspondent feeling, as well as common principle, which draws their affections to each other, as well as their hearts and faculties to one common source and centre. It is not a traditionary religion which attracts them to the faith of their ancestors, nor is it a party-feeling which attaches them to some particular society, but it is a divinely infused principle, communicated by the spirit of God; it is identified in all its essentials; and a genuine Christian is radically the same being, wherever he is found, and under whatever difference of circumstances he exists.

The nearer he approaches to God, the more, in one sense, he will be sensible of his distance from him. Higher views of God's unspeakable holiness, a deeper sense of his own unworthiness, act reciprocally, and confirm each other. Yet

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this growing consciousness of his distance only serves to augment his love. He more and more feels the goodness of God, in having never cast off human nature, in having, immediately on its apostasy, conceived the gracious design to repair its evils, and restore its dignity. He feels, in its full force, that unspeakable consolation which the disciples of the most sublime of all the pagan philosophers lamented was wanting in their religion; they regretted that *between the pure divinity and the impure creature as there is no union, so there can be no communion.* Can any thing more strikingly demonstrate how completely the Mediator provides for that want, and establishes that communion? "It is thus," as a very learned and pious writer has observed, "that the gospel doctrine gives full relief of mind and ease of conscience, as well as encouragement to piety, and discouragement to sin."* It gives not only future hope, but present peace; it is not all in promise, it is much in hand.

Through the silent, but effectual, operations of grace, obedience is become acquiescence, duty is transformed, not only into assent, but choice. If even a heathen could say, Lead me to whatsoever I am appointed, and I will *follow thee, but if I am unwilling, still I will follow thee*, no wonder if the confirmed Christian serves God not so much because he is bound to serve him, as because love is the dictate of his heart, affection the voluntary bent of his disposition. He needs no extraneous attraction, the impulse is from within. The raw recruit requires to be allured by the "fife and spirit-stirring drum," but the veteran soldier follows the service because he loves it, follows it for its own sake. There is no longer any violence done to nature, for the nature is made conformable to the object; the love of Christ constrains him; contrary principles are reconciled, opposite propensities are blended into one, and that one a blessed, though still imperfect, conformity to the image and the will of God. The more his perceptions are cleared and his will purified, the more his faith strengthens; the more simple his views become, the more his thoughts and affections reduce themselves to that one central point, where alone perfection resides.

As he has long observed that the scheme, the show, the fashion of this life passes away, so he does not forget, that his own progress keeps pace with the world, that he also is passing away with it. Fluctuation, vicissitude, and decay, form the very characters of our being. "Nothing continueth in one stay." Surely these perpetual intimations of Scripture

* John Smith.

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were intended for a constant memento, that fondness for things so transitory is as ill-suited to their value as disproportioned to their duration. These constant admonitions inculcate temperance in our joy, and moderation in our sorrow. They teach us to rejoice as if we rejoiced not, and to weep as if we wept not. Whatever is vain in the end, renders all reference to its intermediate course comparatively vain also.

The Christian observes the world around him to be most careful about the things which will end at death; his care is chiefly confined to the things which then begin; and as it is not so much to ascertain the time, as to secure the consequences of death, that he has been anxious, death can never properly be said to be sudden to him, who always knew that the event was as certain as the period was uncertain. But he does not convert the shadows of death into such a thick and substantial cloud, as shall prevent the mental eye from piercing through it, and seeing the glory beyond it. Through this deep, but pervious gloom, the bright prospect opens to that state, a glimpse of which, caught by the eye of faith, has in all ages enabled the sincere Christian to work through all his earthly difficulties: as it has strengthened him to encounter, with holy hope and humble confidence, the trials of life, so he trusts it will sustain him in his last conflict with the terrors of death. "Let me now," says he, "act as seeing him who is invisible; borne up by the promises of the gospel, and strengthened by the eternal Spirit, let me anticipate my heaven, burst my present narrow bounds, shake off the incumbrance of body, annihilate a distance in itself so short, and make that immortality which is near present."

Thus is the image of divine goodness more clearly, though still imperfectly, reflected in the confirmed Christian. The original character of the human heart, as it came from the hands of its Creator, is about to be reinstated in its pristine purity. Sin, the lawless tenant, not the native proprietor of the mansion, will soon be totally expelled; in the mean time, the primitive principle is radicated; the usurper is dethroned, if not altogether dispossessed; he is conquered, if not absolutely expelled; if he sometimes disturb, he can no longer destroy. The exile returns to his forsaken home, the prodigal to his father's house, the pardoned penitent to his God.

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MORAL SKETCHES

OF PREVAILING OPINIONS AND MANNERS,

FOREIGN AND DOMESTIC:

WITH REFLECTIONS ON PRAYER.

Let us make a stand on the ancient ways, and then look about us, and discover what is the straight and right way, and walk in it.—*Lord Bacon on Innovation.*

I know not which is the greater wonder, either that prayer, which is a duty so easy and facile, so ready and apted to the powers and skill and opportunities of every man, should have so great effects and be productive of such mighty blessings; or that we should be so unwilling to use so easy an instrument of producing so much good.—*Bishop Jeremy Taylor.*

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PREFACE.

It is with the sincerest satisfaction, and the most lively gratitude to God, that the writer of these pages is enabled to bear her feeble but heartfelt testimony to the progress which religion has made, and is making, amongst us, especially in the higher, and even the highest, ranks of society.

At a period, therefore, abounding and advancing in almost every kind of religious improvement, she may be thought by those who would be looking for congratulation rather than caution, to have imposed on herself an invidious task, in choosing to dwell less on the triumphs of Christianity, than on the dangers or the errors of some of its professors. Yet she is persuaded that they who have made the greatest proficiency in piety, will be the most ready to forgive the intimations, of which they stand in the least need.

It may, however, justly be said, that the writer might have found more appropriate objects of censure amongst the worldly and the irreligious, than in the more respectable classes whom she has taken the liberty to make the subject of animadversion. But the truth is, the thoughtless and the profligate have been so successively and so perseveringly attacked by far more powerful pens; have been so long assailed by the monitory maxims of the moralist, pelted by the missile weapons of the satirist, and chastised by the grave rebuke of the divine, that, with due deference, she turns over the hitherto incorrigible to stronger and more efficient hands; while she ventures to address her observations to other quarters, where there will be more hope of forgiveness, and less despair of success.

She does not therefore appeal to those who "hear not Moses and the prophets," but rather to those who, in some awful instances, misrepresent them. She presumes, with respect and diffidence, to expostulate with some, who, though exempt from palpable defects in practice, yet require to be reminded that speculative errors cannot be indulged without danger; and to intimate to others, that the practice may be faulty where there are no material errors in the creed. Doubtless indifference to religion will hereafter be more severely judged than mistakes in it, especially if the latter be found to proceed from the head, as the other more apparently does from the heart.

The remarks in the early part of these Sketches, on the excess of continental intercourse, will probably be accused of blamable scrupulosity, and the writer be charged with unnecessary rigor. Yet what enlightened conscience will deny that some of the habits to which allusion is made, militate as much against the self-denying spirit of our religion as more ostensible faults. They would not, however, have been noticed, had they been confined to trifling and common

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characters; but the least error that grows into a habit, and that habit sanctioned by the countenance of the worthy and respectable, becomes more important than even the vices of ordinary men or frivolous women. In lamenting the probable injurious consequences to a large proportion of the myriads, who are still with unabated eagerness crowding to a foreign shore, the author is fully persuaded that many amongst them carry out principles too deeply rooted to be shaken by unprofitable intercourse, and morals too correct to be infected by the fascinations of pleasure. But who will deny that the countenance of those who escape the injury gives an authority to those who receive it? In this view, the wisest and most correct of our emigrants may, by lending themselves to the practice, furnish in the result an apology for things which they themselves disapprove, and thus their example may be pleaded, as favoring what they would be amongst the last to tolerate.

That long and frequent absences from our home, and especially from our country, are not favorable to the mind, is but too visible in that spirit of restlessness induced by so many who have *repeatedly* made the experiment. For it is observable that the desire once indulged, instead of being cooled, is inflamed; inclination becomes voracity. Appetite has grown with indulgence. And is it not to be feared that the sober scenes of domestic, and especially of rural life, will continue to appear more and more insipid in proportion to the frequency with which they are deserted? Will not successive and protracted carnivals convert the quiet scenes of home enjoyment into what the poet calls "a lenten entertainment?"

Home is at once the scene of repose and of activity. A country gentleman of rank and fortune is the sun of a little system, the movements of which his influence controls. It is at home that he feels his real importance, his usefulness and his dignity. Each diminishes in proportion to the distance he wanders from his proper orbit. The old English gentry kept up the reverence and secured the attachment of their dependents by living among them. Personal affection was maintained by the presence of the benefactor. Subordination had a visible head. Whereas obedience to a master they do not see, savors too much of allegiance to a foreign power.

We know that the Roman hero who transgressed the boundaries of his own province by *once* crossing the Rubicon, changed the whole condition, circumstances, constitution, and character of his country. May not the reiterated passage of the straits of Dover eventually produce moral changes not less important?

The mischiefs effected by these incessant migrations may, indeed, be slow, but they are progressive. Principles which would revolt at the idea of any sudden change, are melted down by the gradual relaxation of continued contact. Complacency in the soothing enjoyment creeps on by almost imperceptible advances. The revolution is not the less certain because it is not acknowledged. The conscience, too, is quieted by the geographical anodyne, "I would not do in England what I think it no harm to do in Paris."

Might not a fair practical appeal be made to the different state of the feelings of many of our travellers, on witnessing the open violation of the sanctity of the *first* Sunday, and the *twentieth* repetition of the same abuse? Who can affirm, that familiarity has not gradually diminished the alarm, and in a good measure suppressed the indignation? Who will assert, that this succession of desecrated Sabbaths

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has produced no alteration in the state of their feelings, except that of reconciling them to the practice? They, indeed, who had made such a proficiency in religion as to maintain an unabated sense of the evil, would be the least likely unnecessarily to expose their principles to such a risk.*

For the bold remarks on this dangerous and delicate subject, the culprit throws herself on the mercy, and the anglicism of her readers; on the courtesy of those whose kindness she hopes will not be forfeited by her having shown herself too exclusively an Englishwoman. Anxious, perhaps to a fault, for the welfare, the honor, the prosperity, the character of this queen of islands, she yet believes that there are to be found worse prejudices than those national attachments, which in her are irreclaimable.†

It is not, however, to be conceded, that the term *prejudice*, so frequently applied to these attachments, is, by this application, legitimately used. If prejudice, in its true definition, signifies prepossession, judgment formed beforehand, fondness adopted previously to knowledge, notions cherished without inquiry, opinions taken up and acted upon without examination,—if these be its real significations, and what lexicographer will deny that they are? then how can this term be applied to the more enlightened Britons? How can it be applied to men who, independently of the natural fondness for the soil, and all the objects which endear it; who, in addition to this attachment, feel, acknowledge, and enjoy, in their native country, all the substantial blessings which make life worth living for; a constitution, the best that mortal man has ever yet devised; a religion, above the powers of man indeed to conceive, but reformed and carried to perfection by his agency, taught by the wisdom of God, led by the guidance of his word, and the direction of his Spirit; a system of religious liberty, which, while certain miscreants at home are laboring to destroy under the pretence of improving, some foreign countries are imitating, and all are envying; institutions, which promise to convey the chief of these blessings to the remotest lands;—if all these assertions are true, let it be again asked, whether, if an intimate knowledge, and a long enjoyment of these blessings, should have produced a filial fondness for such a country, that attachment can be denominated *prejudice*, a word which, let it be repeated, was only meant to express blind zeal, neglected examination, and contented ignorance?

May not this growing attachment for foreign manners, by wearing out domestic attachments, create a powerful preponderance in the opposite scale? The English partialities being cured, may not those who shall have conquered them, become more satisfied with their acquired, than their former tastes; may they not fancy, that they are grown more candid, when, perhaps, they are only become less conscientious? When the mind is softened down by pleasurable sensations, pleased with every thing about it, it becomes pleased

* Some friends of the writer, men of the first respectability, who during the late war commanded volunteer corps, have acknowledged to her, that when first called out to drill on Sundays, their religious feelings were most painfully wounded, but by long habit, it gradually became a matter of indifference to them.

† These prefatory apologies for the offences of a subsequent chapter will, it is to be feared, remind the reader of the prudent sinner mentioned by Luther, who in going to purchase indulgences for the faults he had *already* committed, purchased another for a fault he *intended* to commit.

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with itself; begins to look back on its former scrupulous character with present triumph, rejoices in its enlargement from its previous narrowness; congratulates itself on its acquired liberality, calls what was firmness bigotry; and thus to the altered character the strictness it carried abroad appears rigor on its return home!

That the attraction may be inviting, and the temptation considerable, is readily allowed; but if once the rightness of an action should come to be determined by its pleasantness, an entirely new system of morals must be introduced amongst Christians; the question then would be no longer, what *ought* we to do, but what should we *like* to do? That the temptation is not irresistible, appears in the self-denial of those who continue to withstand it: many who have felt the desire have prudently deferred its gratification to a safer season; while others continue to doubt its *general* expediency.

That many among our innumerable travellers have gone abroad on the reasonable ground of health, as well as for the necessary purposes of business, is not to be doubted. And who will deny that some men of great ability and high principle have gone with the meritorious desire of doing moral and religious good, in various directions; and that they have, in no inconsiderable degree, effected it, or at least have opened a door for further improvement? On the other hand the disgraceful truth must not be concealed, that others have carried out more evil from home than they found abroad.

It would be uncharitable and unchristian, to desire to maintain a spirit of hostility between near neighbors; but when neighbors have been so frequently on the alert to find pretences for disagreement, and national safety has sometimes been endangered by the quarrels of individuals, will not good neighborhood be more probably promoted by friendly dispositions and mutual good offices on the respective shores, than by obtrusive visits, which, if they were thoroughly liked, would doubtless be more frequently returned?

For is it not worthy of remark, that we not only refuse to imitate our continental neighbors in the very point in which they are really respectable? *They stay at home.* Even if they do so with the same proud self-preference which made ancient Rome call all the other nations of the world barbarians, it is at least an honest and a patriotic partiality. Would not the natives of our happy land who have less to gain, and more to lose, do well to follow their example in this honorable instance? *They* prudently augment the resources of their country in two ways, by spending their own money in their own land, with the additional profit of holding out to us those allurements, which cause ours to be spent there also.

> O England! model to thy inward greatness,
> Like little body with a mighty heart!
> What might'st thou do that honor bids thee do,
> Were all thy children kind and natural!
> But see, thy fault France hath in thee found it.
>
> SHAKSPEARE.

While the pen is in the hand of the writer, fresh intelligence is brought of conspiracies forming in different parts of the kingdom for its destruction. Can she, therefore, forbear repeating, that if her degenerate sons betray her, and her honorable sons desert her, her perils are indeed imminent?

At her advanced age the writer has little to hope from praise, or little to fear from censure, except as her views may have been in a

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right or wrong direction. She has felt that a renewed attention to growing errors is a duty on those who have the good of mankind at heart. The more nearly her time approaches for her leaving the world, there is a sense in which she feels herself more strongly interested in it; she means an increasing anxiety for its improvement; for its advance in all that is right in principle, and virtuous in action. And as the events and experience of every day convince her that there is no true virtue that is not founded in religion, and no true religion which is not maintained by PRAYER, she hopes to be forgiven, if with declining years and faculties, yet with increasing earnestness, from increasing conviction of its value, she once more ventures to impress this last, important topic, on their attention.

If then she has enlarged even to diffuseness on the subject of prayer, it is because she is fervently desirous to suggest it, as the surest counteractive of those many aberrations of heart and practice but too visible amongst us. In some former publications, however, she had expatiated so largely on this inexhaustible topic, that, in order to avoid repetition, she has chiefly limited her present observations on prayer to the errors which may prevent its efficacy, together with the allusions to certain classes of character in whom these errors most abound.

In taking her final leave of her readers, may she be allowed to express her gratitude for their long unwearied indulgence; for a patience which the too frequent demands on it could not exhaust; for their candor in forgiving her bold remonstrances; for their kindness in bearing with her faults in consideration of her desire to be useful; and for extending to one who had nothing to offer but right intentions, that favor to which merit might have put in a fairer claim.

Barley-Wood, July 24, 1819.

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SKETCHES OF FOREIGN MANNERS.

Foreign Associations.

We had fervently hoped, during a war unparalleled in duration and severity, that if ever the blessing of peace should be restored, all would be well again: we had hoped, that at least we should be brought back to our previous situation, with that improvement in humility and gratitude, which the remembrance of past sufferings, and recent deliverance from those sufferings, would seem naturally to produce. If our pleasant feelings in such a prospective event were shaded at all, it was simply by the irreparable and individual loss of a father, son, or brother, which almost every family, of every rank, had sustained. Peace was at length providentially granted to our arms and to our prayers; but all the blessings we had anticipated did not return in her train:

> Ease still recants
> Vows made in pain, as violent and void.

Were it not almost doubtful whether in some respects the change may have proved a benefit, if it should be found to be the choice between the two evils, the waste of human lives, or the decay of moral principles? Some scrupulous persons may even think it requires no very correct arithmetic to determine on the comparative value of perishable lives and immortal souls.

What then was the first use we made of a benefit so earnestly implored,—a blessing which we fondly flattered ourselves would be converted to so many salutary purposes? This peace, for which so many prayers were offered, so many fasts appointed; this peace, whose return was celebrated by thanksgivings in every church, and, as we hope, in every house, and in every heart, to what purpose was its restoration devoted?

This peace was seized on not as a means to repair, in some measure, the ravages which were made on the commerce, the property, the comforts, as well as the population of our coun-

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try; but must it not, in many instances, be said truly, though most painfully said, to vary their nature, and enhance their malignity? Instead of sedulously employing it to raise us to our former situation, by a prudent restriction in our indulgences, an increased residence in our respective districts, and an endeavor to lighten the difficulties of government, by the continued contribution of its rightful supplies; instead of using it to mitigate the distresses, and to restrain the crimes of the lower orders, by living in the midst of them, each at its natural and appropriate station, and thus neutralizing the spirit of disaffection, which took advantage only of their absence to break out; instead of improving its opportunities, or providing against the impending scarcity, which the desertion of the rich increased almost to famine, in giving employment to the industrious, relief to the sick, and bread to the famished; instead of each sentinel remaining at his providentially appointed watch,—at this critical moment, a very large proportion of our nobles and gentry, an indefinite number of our laity, and not a few of our clergy, that important part of the community, of which the situation is peculiarly local; all these, as if simultaneously seized by that mania which, in fabulous history, is said to have sent *one* unfortunate object of divine persecution wandering through the world,—all these important portions of our country at once abandoned it. The only use they made of peace was to fly, with most unrighteous speed, to the authors of our calamities, and of such calamities as it might be thought could not at once have been forgotten, to visit a country which had filled our own with widows and orphans, which had made the rest of Europe a scene of desolation.

Not only hundreds of thousands of our country, men, and women, and children, but millions of our money, so severely wanted at home, were transported from every port to visit this lately execrated country. To *visit* did I say? that had been little; a short excursion to feed the eye, and gratify the taste with pictures and statues, might have been pleaded as a natural temptation.

Here we conceive the grave Christian moralist will censure the writer as much as she censures the emigrants. He will say, "the desire is too natural to be right." If we plead in mitigation of damages that it was innocent curiosity, we shall be told, that it was a curiosity which one of our first parents believed innocent, but which lost them both paradise. If it was a desire of knowledge, it might be a knowledge better unknown; if to cure those prejudices, "for which our

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country is a name so dear," such prejudices may better be retained than cured.

But be this as it may, the truth is, that to multitudes, France was not made a place of visit, but a home. For when these wonderful productions of art were restored to the places from whence they had been feloniously taken, did that allay the hunger of emigration? France became the settled residence of multitudes. France was made a scene for the education of English, of Christian, of Protestant children! Sons and daughters, even in the middle ranks of life, were transported thither with an eagerness, as if the land of blood had been a land of promise. And as all fashions descend, not a few of our once simple, plain-hearted English yeomen were drawn in to follow the example of *their betters*, as they are not very correctly called. The infection became general, nor has time as yet stayed the plague.

A late French wit,* who always preferred a calumny to a fact, and was more fond of giving a neat turn to a sentence than of speaking truth, after visiting this country about the middle of the last century, characterized its natives by saying, the English people resembled their own beer, the top was all froth, the bottom all dregs, but the middle was excellent. If this were at that time true, the middle class has now merged its distinctive character in the other two; it is abandoning the honorable station in the cup which it then held, is adopting its worst ingredients from above and below, and by its mixture with the froth and the feculence, has considerably lessened its claim to its once distinct commendation.†

But the evil, great as it is, does not end here; numbers of a higher strain remain domiciliated in France, and too many who are returned are more than ever assimilated with French manners. It is to be feared, that with French habits, French principles may be imported. French alliances are contracted, as almost every newspaper records. We are losing our national character. The deterioration is by many thought already visible. In a few years, if things proceed in their present course, or rather with increasing velocity, which is always the case with downward tendencies, the strong and discriminating features of the English heart and mind will be obliterated, and we shall be lost in the undistinguished mass.

In the mean time let us take warning from the considera-

* Voltaire.

† It is almost too ludicrous to assert, that the wife of a reputable farmer, being asked lately what she had done with her daughter, replied, "I have *Frenched* her and *musicked* her, and shall now carry her to France."

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tion, that the first stage of decline is the beginning of dissolution. Whatever has begun already to decay, is not far from perishing. This contagious intercourse has been too probably the cause of the recent multiplication of those great Sunday entertainments, in the diminution of which we had begun to rejoice; a multiplication which is as likely to contribute to the decline of religion in the domestic arrangements of the great, as in any more obvious and ostensible evil.

What would the veteran moralist, who, in his beautiful and vigorous satire, indignantly exclaimed,

> I cannot bear a French metropolis;

what would Johnson have said had he been spared till now?

> How would he laugh at Britain's modern tribe,
> Dart the keen taunt, and edge the piercing gibe!

How would he have poured out his ready wrath, his cutting sarcasm, his powerful reasoning, his robust morality, on a country which is in danger of deserting its own character, impairing its own virtue, and discrediting its own religion?

We set a just value on the French language as the introduction to much elegant literature; to much indeed that is valuable, but to more that is pernicious. But even this agreeable language, for the higher acquisition of which so many important sacrifices are made, so much domestic duty is relinquished, so much religious principle is hazarded, may be bought too dear. Even if this supreme excellence, the perfection of the Parisian accent, *should* obtain for an English lady the coveted distinction of being taken for a French woman; does she not run some risk, even in her own country and her own home, from the habit of domesticating in our families persons of whom all she may know is, that their accent is good; of whose morals she knows little; and of whose religion she knows nothing, except that, if they happen by great chance to have any, it is of a character hostile to her own. The only hope is, that the foreign teacher may care so little about the matter, as never to introduce religion at all: but this is not a very consoling consideration in the instructers of our children.

There is another grievance connected with this mania for whatever is foreign,—a grievance not the less serious because it is overlooked, and because it affects only a subordinate class in society; we allude to the injury sustained by our domestic manufactures from the abundant importation of French articles of dress and decoration. We forbear to enter on the subject in all its painful extent; we forbear to advert to the

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looms that are standing still, to the gloominess of our trading streets, to the warehouses that are left solitary, to the shops which are nearly deserted; and shall confine our humble remonstrance to pleading more particularly the distress of those unfortunate females who used to procure a decent support by their own industry, and of whom thousands are now plunging into misery. We would fervently but respectfully advocate the cause of this meritorious and most pitiable class.

If British patriotism be not a plea sufficiently powerful to restrain a temptation, which can only be indulged by the violation of laws, which perhaps the husbands and fathers of the fair offenders have established, we would appeal to the sensibilities of a well-regulated heart, to the tenderness of an enlightened conscience, and to the dictates of justice and charity, whether it be pardonable to yield to every slight temptation merely to gratify vanity, or, to speak more tenderly, to indulge a capricious taste.

When tempted to make the alluring purchase by the superior beauty, real or imaginary, of the article, might we not presume to recommend to every lady to put some such questions as the following to herself:—"By this gratification, illicitly obtained, I not only offend against human laws, but against humanity itself; by this purchase I am perhaps starving some unfortunate young creature of my own sex, who gained her daily bread by weaving her lace or braiding her straw. I am driving her to that extremity of want which may make her yield to the next temptation to vice, which may drive her to the first sinful means that may offer of procuring a scanty, precarious, and miserable support. It is in vain that I may have perhaps subscribed for her being taught better principles at school, that I have perhaps assisted in paying for her acquisition of her little trade, if by crushing that trade I now drive her to despair, if I throw her on a temptation which may overcome those better principles she acquired through my means. Shall I not then make this paltry—this no sacrifice? Shall I not obtain a victory over this petty allurement, whose consequences when I first gave way to it I did not perceive?"

The distress here described is not a picture drawn by the imagination, a touch of sentimentalism, to exhibit feeling, and to excite it. It is a plain and simple representation of the state of multitudes of young women, who, having been bred to no other means of gaining their support, will probably, if these fail, throw themselves into the very jaws of destruction. Think, then, with tenderness, on these thousands of young

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persons of your own sex, whom a little self-denial on your part might restore to comfort—might snatch from ruin. Many ladies, who make these unlawful purchases, do not want feeling, they only want consideration. Consider, then, we once more beseech you, consider, that it is not merely their bread, but their virtue, of which you may be unintentionally depriving them; and you will find, that your error is by no means so inconsiderable as it may hitherto have appeared to you.

If the superiority of the foreign purchase you are about to make be not great, you have gained little or nothing by your fault; if it is, and you forego it, you have gained a victory over your own inclination,—the victory of an honest principle over a misleading fancy.

Spare yourself, then, the pain of feeling that, if you hear of any of these unfortunate beings having previously to their entering on other sinful courses been tempted by famine to commit a robbery—spare yourself the pain of reflecting, that you, perhaps, by a thoughtless gratification of your taste, first robbed her of that subsistence, the failure of which has driven her to a crime she abhorred. The evil which appeared little, considered by itself, considered in its possible consequences is of no small magnitude.

But to return. It was from the land of polished arts that ancient Rome imported the poison of her sturdy morals, the annihilation of her masculine character. England has a palladium for her protection, which Ilium, which Rome never possessed. Yet on that guardian genius depended, as the people thought, the safety of the former; of the latter, it was considered as the destiny. Our palladium is the CHRISTIAN, the PROTESTANT RELIGION. It cannot be taken by storm; but, like that of Ilium, it may be taken by stratagem. The French are to us as much more formidable than the Greeks were to Rome, as we have much more to lose. While our guardian genius remains inclosed within our walls, we shall be safe, in spite of wars and revolutions; if we neglect it, like the besieged city of antiquity, we fall: losing our religion, we lose all with it. Religion is our compass, the only instrument for directing and determining our course; and though it will not save the trouble of working the vessel, nor diminish the vigilance of guarding against rocks and shoals; yet it constantly points to that star which, by ascertaining our course, insures our safety.

In making our country an island, divine Providence seems to have made a provision for our happiness as well as for our

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security. As that circumstance has protected us from the sword, it should also protect us from the manners of our continental neighbors. The more she labors to resume them, the more she will lose of her independent character. *Le gout du terroir* is often mentioned as the distinctive mark of the country which produces certain wines. The British character, we hope, will always retain its indigenous flavor.

But if Britain, blest by Heaven above all the nations, ancient or modern, recorded in the annals of history, sacred or profane, has not made the most of all the advantages bestowed on her; if she has not yet made the best use of that elevation on which divine Providence has placed her; if she has not yet applied to the best possible ends the rich gifts with which he has endowed her; nor turned the provision made for her happiness to the best account: if, standing on the loftiest summit of naval, military, and literary glory; if, favored with the best civil and religious constitution the wit of man has yet divised;—if, with all these advantages, she has yet some steps to ascend before she reach to the height to which the Almighty seems to have destined her, let her remember she has resources within herself, by which, with the blessing of Him who conferred them, she may still set an example to all the kingdoms of the earth. We will not say she may acquire a superiority over other nations—of that she has long been in possession—no; we must not try her by her comparative, but her positive merit: not by placing her in juxtaposition with other countries, but with the possibilities of her own excellence.

Britain, we repeat, has abundant resources. If it be true that she has lately, in any respect, gone back, rather than advanced; if, when her public character has reached its zenith, her private character is in any thing deteriorated, she has still within herself all the materials of moral renovation; ample means, not only of recovering what has been lost, but of rising to heights yet unattained. It is only to be wished that she may use these resources, and consider them as raw materials, that will not produce their effect without being industriously worked up.

If the familiar and protracted intercourse with a neighboring nation; if, during this intercourse, the long witnessed contempt of religion, morbid insensibility to morals, desecrated Sabbaths, an abandonment to amusements the most frivolous, to pleasures knit in one eternal dance; if all this should happily have left unimpaired, or have only tinctured too slightly to make a lasting impression, the noble simplicity,

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the ancient rectitude, the sound sense, and the native modesty which have long been the characteristics of the British people; if the growth at home, and within our own doors, of an intolerant and superstitious church, be not too fondly fostered—be not promoted instead of tolerated; if the paramount fondness, in the more delicate sex, for unbounded dissipation, for profane and immoral writers, should decline; if the middle classes among us should return to their ancient sobriety and domestic habits, should cease to vie with the great in expensive dress, and the decorations of high life, and to give their daughters the same useless accomplishments, which are carried too far even in the highest station, and in theirs are preposterous; if the instruction we are at length giving to the poor be as conscientiously conducted as it is generally adopted, and the art of reading be made the vehicle of true religion; if a judicious correction of our criminal code, and a prudent rectification of the demand of pauperism, be successfully followed up; if the African slave-trade should be effectually abolished—not in promise, and on paper, but in very deed and act; if our prisons be made places of reform, instead of increased corruption; if the young offenders be so instructed, that they come not out as bad as the old, and the old come not out worse than they went in; if our venerable universities should fulfil the promise they give of becoming as distinguished for moral discipline and strict religion, as they have ever been, and still are, unrivalled for learning and ability of every kind; if churches be as readily attended as they will be cheerfully provided; if there be the same honorable attention paid to filling the pulpits as to raising the buildings; if the Bible be as generally read by the giver, as it is liberally bestowed on the receiver; if the good old practice of family prayer should be revived, and public worship more carefully attended by those who give the law to fashion; if those who are "the makers of manners" will adopt none but such as deserve to be imitated:—if all these improvements should take place—and which of them, let me ask, is impossible?—then, though we laugh to scorn the preposterous notion of human perfectibility, we shall yet have a right to expect that England, so far from being satisfied to excel other nations, will not only excel her present self, but be continually advancing in the scale of Christian perfection.

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French Opinion of English Society.

The French nation have lately had many opportunities for forming their opinion of the English. It may be worth our while to consider what opinion they *have* formed; since by ascertaining their present judgment of the English character, we may form some instructive conclusions as to the change their tuition is likely to effect in it.

Foreigners are of opinion that we want polish. If this were all, we should rather blame their discernment, or their deficiency in fair deduction. For grant us that we are solid, and we have high authority for saying that solid bodies take the brightest polish. And if in point of fact the English character, like the English oak, be susceptible of no inconsiderable polish, it is owing in both to the inherent soundness and firmness of its substance. Soft bodies admit of little polish: in them, therefore, recourse is had to varnish, which hides all flaws; and the thicker it is applied, the more surely it conceals the meanness of the materials beneath its surface.

A late brilliant female writer,* whose genius it would be a reflection on our own taste not to admire, and on our own candor not to extol, has, towards the end of her admirable posthumous work, done, in general, noble justice to the English character. She had talents to appreciate, and opportunities to examine it, in its highest condition and most advantageous forms. It must be observed, that we here presume to touch on no part of her able delineation of English habits and manners, but only so far as private society and conversation are concerned. On these points we are to look for her exceptions: though on the society of the gentlemen she animadverts with the most flattering consideration; and even to that of the ladies she makes a frequent and generous, but not very successful, effort to be civil.

However, with all the politeness and good-nature of this fine writer, two qualities which she seems to have possessed in no ordinary degree, it frequently escapes her, that she found the English ladies deplorably deficient in those shining talents and airy graces which embellish society. Had her visit to London been three or four years later, she might possibly have found, in some quarters, stronger marks of improvement in this talent so near her heart; at least if any expectation might be formed from their subsequent intercourse

* Madame de Staël.

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with the society of Paris, the charms of which she never fails to exhibit in those glowing colors which she so well knows how to lay on, even on the worst ground.

But this eloquent panegyrist of animated conversation seems to be a little mistaken in some of the causes to which she ascribes the heaviness of London parties. She laments with deeper concern than the occasion, even had it been real, seems to require, that the great English gentlemen regularly retire, and spend nine months in the year on their estates in the country. We wish she had happened to mention in what quarter of the kingdom this annual retreat is made, where this voluntary exile *to* the native home is to be found.

We say voluntary, for British gentlemen are not *relegues* from our capital, as ex-ministers and discarded favorites used to be from Paris. Neither the fate, nor the credit, nor the liberty, nor the choice of habitation of a man of rank in this country, depends on the favor of an arbitrary king; nor does his happiness, his general acceptance, nor his respectability, hang on the smiles of a despotic and capricious master. And if her concern be excessive for the annual voluntary banishment of our men of taste from the centre of social delights, which she would wish to see converted into a circle "never ending, still beginning;" had this lady never further heard of such places as Bath, or Tunbridge, or Brighton, or any other of those numberless felicitous resources, those supplemental relaxations, those by-reliefs of the *ennui* of retreat, which always stand ready to intercept the speed of the fashionable exile, and to break the fall between the London and the country home?

But if even the fact were as desperate as she intimates, the self-imposed regulation would not be likely to produce the effect she deprecates. This lady, born herself to excel in polished society, regrets this injurious retreat, chiefly because it interrupts the brilliant intercourse of the metropolis, and causes conversation to suffer so tedious and melancholy a suspension. Now we should almost as soon have expected that a philosopher would have imagined a supernumerary eclipse of the sun for the same period, and then have brought it to account for the late dreariness of the natural world and the inclemency of the seasons.

She laments that the manner in which these absentees from the source and centre of intellectual enjoyment spend their time in the country, not a little disqualifies them for the charms of society. With all due deference to this able reasoner, from whom it is hazardous to differ, we should have

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really thought, that the long leisure for reading, to which this supposed solitude must be at least as favorable to some as that indolence, sleeping, and drinking which she too indiscriminately ascribes to most, would have been generally seized on for the former purpose by men, who are all scholars by education, and frequently studious from taste. Thus, instead of starving the intellect, would not this leisure rather serve to nourish it; and, instead of lowering the mind, furnish it with fresh images, enrich it with new ideas, and, aided by the "short retirement urging sweet return," dispose it to repair with a full mind, additional spirit, replenished resources, and increased energy, to that more splendid society which she deems the life of life; that feast of intellect, of which the writer of these pages is fully disposed to acknowledge the pleasure and the profit? Those to whom she alludes, who only hunt, and loll, and drink, and sleep at their country-seats, are not, we presume, of that race of active intellect who would swell the flow of soul by their contributions, were they even tied as closely and constantly to the metropolis as the tavern waiter who draws their corks, or the more respectable purveyor who supplies the market with their luxuries.

As we presume that there is at this time at least as much genius, and taste, and literature, at home, as in any capital abroad, consequently there can be no deficiency of the finest materials for enriching and embellishing society, were their possessors a little more disposed to imitate a neighboring nation in one talent, in which they must be allowed to excel all others—the talent *se faire valoir*.

There is more sterling weight than show in the genuine English character; and Mr. Addison was not the only one of his countrymen, who, with respect to intellectual wealth, could draw for a thousand pounds, though he may not always have a guinea in his pocket. But if they are incessantly producing all they are worth to every comer; when called out in public situations, in the senate, the pulpit, or at the bar, we see all the energies of genius in all its opulence and variety. We see the most powerful reasoning, adorned by the most persuasive eloquence. With these ample materials for conversation, they are not perhaps driven, like some of their more volatile neighbors, to talk for the sake of talking. Talking is not with Englishmen so completely a *besoin*, so entirely a natural necessity. They are more disposed to consider conversation as the refreshment than the pabulum of life. Added to this, their professional and laborious duties abroad may make some of them frequently consider society

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as a scene in which rather to repose their minds, than to keep them in full exercise.

Learning in this country is not confined to academicians, authors, and professional men. There is scarcely a man of fortune in the kingdom who, if he be not actually learned, has not, however, been bred to learning. The effect of that high institution, brought from the halls and bowers of our distinguished seats of learning, is generally diffused; it serves to fill and adorn the stations of dignity, honor, and utility of public, as well as to grace the shade and raise the tone of private life. So that an illiterate gentleman is more rarely to be met with in this country, than in any other in the world. When a learned dignitary of our church inquired of one of the French emigrant clergy, who took refuge in England, if he understood Greek, he coolly replied, "*Monsieur, nous avons un professeur!*"

But to return to the other sex. Our only fear on this subject is, lest they should not always remain what the writer in question represents them as being at present. If, indeed, we were only sent into this world to be entertaining; if we had nothing to do but to talk, nothing to aim at but to shine, nothing to covet but admiration; we should more readily coincide in opinion with this sprightly lady.

A great ancient has pronounced silence to be no unimportant art in society, and points, in a particular instance, at one man, as the wisest in an enlightened assembly, because he knew how to hold his tongue. If there had not been many discreet imitators of this taciturn orator in the London parties, what a diminution would it have been in the number of this lady's delighted auditors, and what a lessening of their own gratification in enjoying the exhibition of her superlative talents!

There are, indeed, very frequently sounder causes for being silent than deficiency of talent or lack of information; and how happily would the multitude of idle talkers be diminished, if they never opened their mouths but when they had something to say. The writer in question ascribes to causes which appear quite new, the reserve and insipidity of the English ladies, when she says, that the true motive is the fear of ridicule; and that as they are not called upon to enliven conversation, they are more struck with the danger of talking, than with the inconvenience of silence. She then, somewhat unaccountably, goes on to attribute the frigidity of their society to the dread of newspapers; and conjectures, that because they do not delight in political warfare, they

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keep themselves back as much as possible in the presence of others. We did not know that English ladies were either so political or so discreet, or that vivacity and the graces were such heavy losers from these unsuspected causes. Perhaps this lady did not know that the English educate, or rather *did once* educate, women of fashion for *home*. A man of sense will desire to find in his domestic associate good taste, general information, and a correct judgment. In the course of their literary pursuits and conversation together, he will take pleasure in refining and improving her mind; but he would not delight in a wife who will be always introducing subjects for debate, who will be always disputing the palm of victory. Competition and emulation do not contain the elements of domestic happiness. He married for a companion, not for a competitor. Rivalry is no great promoter of affection; nor does superiority in wit always confer superiority in happiness. A professed female wit, like a professed devotee to music, will be soon weary of wasting her talent on her husband; and even he, though he might like such an occasional display in a visit to the house of his friend, will find other talents wanting in a constant home-companion: talents which will not only embellish, but improve society; qualities which will eclipse wit, and outlive beauty.

We do not find that those brilliant French women, who had spoiled this sprightly writer for English society, reserved their wit for the entertainment of their husbands, or their learning for the instruction of their families. Their most graceful ethic and courtly poet, who had the best opportunities of ascertaining the real value of professed wits in society, has given his estimate in a single line:

Discurs de bons mots, fades caracteres!

Among other deductions from brilliant society in England, this lively writer laments an evil, which, if things proceed as they have now begun, we fear may not always remain a subject of lamentation, as coquetry is, in her recipe book, the flavor which gives to society its poignancy: and this zest she complains is not to be found in England, except in the unmarried! If, however, the growing imitation of French manners should hereafter add this new savor to the real accomplishments of English ladies, their fathers and husbands may not think it the most desirable finishing. She accounts for the fondness of our ladies for foreign travel in a manner not the most flattering to their purity, by supposing it to arise as much from the desire of escaping from the restraint on

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their manners, as from the influence of the fogs on their constitutions.

She is at no loss to know the true cause of a fact, which we are entirely indebted to her sagacity for discovering at all, namely, why *the disgust of life* seizes on those women who are confined to these inanimate societies. Certainly this explanation admits the following preliminary question,—Are the movers in these lifeless circles disgusted with their existence? By the way, we do not quite understand whether by *le degout de la vie* she means a dislike to company, or a taste for suicide.

But let us do justice to her who has in most respects done ample justice to our country. If she is a little sickened with the moody taciturnity, and unassuming manners of our ladies, she graciously redeems their characters by making them a full allowance of the more solid virtues; she acknowledges that sincerity and truth form the basis of their conversation, even where all the graces are wanting. It is somewhat doubtful, however, whether she would not willingly have relinquished the actual, in exchange for the absent qualities.

While we continue to preserve, or rather to improve in, this only true foundation of Christian intercourse, we will less regret the want of its embellishments; and while reserve is protection, and delicacy security, we will console ourselves under these minor evils, which are considered as so cruelly detracting from the fascinations of polished society.

Lord Chesterfield, who adorned conversation by his wit as much as he impaired it by his principles, has defined politeness "to be the art of pleasing." Saint Paul, one of the few writers with whom this accomplished peer was not acquainted, recommends, with as much warmth as his lordship, the duty of pleasing our neighbor. But here the two moralists part. The noble writer would have us please others to benefit ourselves. All his precepts originate, proceed, and terminate in that one object—self. The Christian writer directs us to "please others for their good," their highest good, their moral "edification." The essence of the worldly code of ethics is selfishness; that of the Christian is disinterestedness.

There is a generosity in Christian intercourse, the very reverse of that little and narrowing spirit ascribed to it by those who do not know, or do not love it. It cannot be otherwise; for are not those who cultivate it ever the followers of him, whose sublime characteristic it was, "that he pleased not himself?"

In the society of Christians, every man does not so much

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look on his own things as on the things of others. Christians do not make conversation a theatre for dispute or display. They consider it as a reciprocation of benignity; a desire to draw out the talents of those who, with more merit, have less pretension. An interchange of sentiment between intellectual and highly principled persons confers both pleasure and benefit. To make it at once pleasant and profitable, there must be an accordance of principle, if not of opinion. The conversation will frequently have a tincture of religion, even when the topic under discussion is not religious. Topics barely secular are susceptible of this spirit; and in pious and discreet hands, they will be treated in a way to promote religion without professing it.

True religion keeps the whole man in order, whether he be engaged in business or in company. It sheds its benign influence far beyond its own sphere, and by a reflex light casts a ray on actions or speculations to which it has no immediate reference. The Christian does not go out of his way in search of wit or embellishment, though he does not refuse them when they naturally present themselves, when they grow out of the subject, and the story is not invented for their forced introduction, nor any sacrifice made of something better than themselves. The Christian uses his talents temperately, seeks not to eclipse the less brilliant; and had much rather not shine at all, than shine at the expense of another. The religious man in society finds means for the exercise of many Christian virtues without descanting on them,—candor, charitable construction, patience with the less enlightened and temper with the less forbearing, a scrupulous veracity, an inviolable sincerity, a watchful guard against every vain thought and every light expression. He is careful to preserve wit unsullied, gayety pure, and vivacity correct. He is constantly on the watch to introduce subjects of a higher strain; when the occasion offers, he gladly embraces it, but with a due regard to time, place, and circumstance. Let it be observed we are not here speaking of select society, associating for religious improvement, but of the duty of keeping ordinary conversation within the bounds and under the discipline of correct principle.

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English Opinion of French Society.

It may at first sight be censured as a departure from the general design of these slight pages, to introduce any allusion to the manners of foreign countries, as exhibited in their own journals, memoirs, and letters. But when it is considered how deeply our own manners are now becoming assimilated with theirs, it may not be thought quite irrelevant to the subjects under consideration, to take a cursory view of the habits of society in a neighboring metropolis, so far as they may be likely to affect and influence those of our own country, avoiding every thing public or political, or general, and confining the few cursory remarks to be made to the fashionable circles of private society.

Paris has been long looked up to by many with admiration, as the centre of all that is brilliant in wit, or fascinating in conversation. In a capital, which before the revolution was said to contain twenty thousand men of letters, high society was not likely to want eulogists. The extravagant encomiums bestowed on these societies by their own people, and echoed back by ours, may prevent its being thought inexpedient to give a superficial sketch of a few of the leading characters which seem to have set the superiority of the circles over which they presided above all competition. It is, we repeat, the apprehension that this boasted superiority may kindle undue admiration, and even excite envy, in the ardent and ingenuous mind of young persons of taste, who feel themselves precluded from the enjoyment, which must apologize for the freedom, whilst it explains the motive, of these observations.

It is indeed wounding to delicacy to speak explicitly on things which should not be so much as named. Yet though it is painful to touch on such topics, how shall we be so likely to prevent evils as by exposing them? Perhaps it may check the desire of imitation, lightly to touch on a few of the *bad characters* who preside over these *good societies*.

That many have escaped their pollution, is a thing more to inspire wonder than to excite imitation. All do not die of the plague where the plague rages; but the preservation of the few is no proof of the salubrity of the air, where so many have been infected.

In certain societies the difficulties of being witty is materially diminished by the readiness of the speaker to make any sacrifice, both to piety and modesty, to the good thing he is

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about to utter. While the feeling of that very sacrifice may perhaps give a keener relish to the pleasure of the profane hearer, the Christian, not inferior in talent, rejects in horror the reputation for wit to be obtained by any such sacrifice himself, and disdains to sanction or applaud it as the hearer of others.

Though the late sanguinary revolution in France overturned law, order, government, and religion, and had given a more emphatical character to crime of every description; yet if we take a cursory view of the period immediately preceding it, we shall see that this tremendous convulsion rather aggravated than introduced many of its moral corruptions. To be convinced of this, we need not travel so far back as the period which the natives consider as the *acmé* of human glory—the age of *Louis Quatorze*, of Richelieu, and the Academy, the immortal Forty, as this academy had the modesty to call itself.

More sober thinkers are, however, of opinion, that what characterized that splendid reign, was unbounded extravagance, elegant profligacy, and tolerated debauchery. Surely these, which were its notorious distinctions, are practices which contribute little to the real grandeur of a country; unless, indeed, it can be proved that, according to the fearfully unguarded expression of the otherwise moral Burke, that the exhibition of vice in a better taste, by taking from it all its apparent grossness, takes away half of its real turpitude.

What arts of refinement could neutralize the evil, when all the bounds of moral restraint were so far broken through, as that the royal wife and the royal mistress were everywhere received with the same appearance of respect, when they were even met together in the same societies?

Louis has lately obtained, in certain quarters, a kind of resuscitation of his buried fame, by the only method perhaps by which it could have been raised,—a comparison with the prisoner of St. Helena. But surely to have committed fewer crimes than the man who has committed more than any other man, is not to have attained a very high degree in the scale of moral excellence. Are splendor in decoration and magnificence in expense a mantle broad enough to cover that injustice and those exactions on a plundered people by which they were purchased? The piety of the king's latter days is frequently thrown into the scale against the disorders of his earlier life. But surely the transition from profligacy to persecution is no great improvement in the human character. Were not his false virtues even more destructive than his

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avowed vices? Did matters take a better turn, when the monarch, by exchanging gross immoralities for the exercise of a superstitious and intolerant religion, indulged himself and his directress in a long and bitter persecution of his own subjects? a persecution accompanied with every act of the most unrelenting cruelty. Exile, proscription, torture, death, were the rewards of four millions of his faithful Protestant subjects! To these rigorous exercises of arbitrary power, he was encouraged and impelled by a woman who had herself been educated in the faith she now endeavors to exterminate. We pass over this intermediate government of "the godless regent trembling at a star," in whose character, in addition to the most disgraceful vices, we see a shocking, but not uncommon union of the wildest superstition with the most avowed infidelity.

During the reign of the next equally corrupt successor, we have endless records of the state of society among persons in the higher walks of life. These notices are to be found in a multitude of the letters and memoirs of the individuals who were themselves actors and interlocutors in these scenes of familiar life. These fashionable societies are all that come within our present designs. Many of those works have preserved the history of characters, principles, and sentiments, which, had they been consigned to eternal oblivion, religion would have had less to mourn, and virtue less to regret.

Many of these writings, for life would be too short, and time ill spent to peruse them all, are adorned with elegancies of composition, and graces of style, which, had they been devoted to the purposes for which they were given, might have benefited the world as much as they have injured it. Out of all these mischievous but lighter writings, we shall only mention one or two: nor would they have been noticed in a little work of this nature, but for the popularity they have obtained among us, and our dread of that natural progress, the tendency of admiration to produce imitation.

In the Life of Marmontel, written by himself, we have an extraordinary specimen of decorous vice and accredited infamy—of abandoned manners, to which reference is frequently made, at least to the characters which exhibit them, without the slightest feeling of their turpitude. Vices abound and are revealed without the least apparent suspicion of their guilt. The intimations, indeed, are not repeated in the way of boasting, but look as if the writer did not think that concealment of the vice would raise the character he was eulogizing. If there are no offensive descriptions of vicious man-

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ners, it seems to be because they were not understood to be vicious; and if gayety of spirit seems to conceal from the writer the complexion of his own morals, gayety of style seems almost to make the reader lose sight of the character of the company in which he is passing his time. In fact the delineation of those characters consists rather in a morbid insensibility to sin, than in an ambitious display of it. The slight veil thrown over corrupt manners by decency of expression, seems the effect of some remains, not of principle, but of good taste. It is the cool-bloodedness of a heart stagnated by long habits of impunity; for while the passions are inflamed by criminal indulgences, the sensibilities of the soul are chilled. The mind insensibly loses that delicacy of perception which nicely distinguishes not only the shades of evil, but the very existence of the distinction between vice and virtue. This deadness of principle, and liveliness of language, it is which makes this writer, and others we could name, so peculiarly dangerous.

Women of fashion, of the very worst description, to whose parties the writer referred to was familiarly admitted, are named with unbounded admiration, not merely of their talents, but their virtues. The charms of their conversation, and the amiableness of their characters, are the theme of his unmixed panegyric. Incidentally, however, as a thing by the by, as a trifle not requiring to be named expressly, as a thing not invalidating any of their perfections, it comes out, that these women, so faultless and so panegyrized, are living in an illicit commerce with different men—men, whose wives are, with the same uncensurable guilt, carrying on similar connections with the husbands of other women! Sobriety, chastity, the conjugal and maternal virtues, are not thought necessary to be called in to complete their round of perfection. Impurity of heart and life, dereliction of all the domestic duties, are never brought forward as any deduction from the all-atoning merit of graces of manner and vivacity of conversation.

Divine Providence seems to have intended advanced age as a season of repose, reflection, and preparation for death; and to have sent its infirmities, sufferings, and debility, as gracious intimations of our approaching change, and with a merciful view of our attaining by those remembrances to the end of our faith, even the salvation of our souls.

But one of the unhallowed projects on which these accomplished societies seem to have congratulated themselves, was in defeating this providential procedure. It was their boasted aim to cheat old age of itself—of its present inconveniences,

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its decays, and its prospective views, by a more amusing method. They contrived to divert the stage of infirmity into a scene of superinduced gayety and increased levity. Instead of desiring to invest it with the peaceful attributes of calmness and resignation, they invented the means of making old age lose itself, as it were, in youthful images, not only by indulging in light reading, but loose composition. One of them was so successfully boiled in Medea's kettle, that his eulogist triumphantly tells us he translated Ariosto, and published tales exhibiting pictures of voluptuousness without indecency; and these boasted exploits are adduced as adding fresh laurels to a being on the very verge of eternity!

Hear a celebrated academician immortalize one of the deceased confraternity in his public oration! In illustrating the character of his friend, who died in extreme old age, he describes this period as "a season when ingenious trifling is peculiarly graceful; a period in which men might give themselves up to levity with the least scruple and the most success. It is in old age," says the orator, "that *the mind is disabused on all subjects, and that a man has a right to jest upon every thing!* It is then that long experience has taught him the wit of concealing reason under a veil which may embellish it!"*

Whoever has cast an eye on the lately published letters of Madame du Deffand,—a most unnecessary and unprofitable addition to the late load of similar literary mischiefs,—will have beheld such a picture of the manners even of private and select society, among persons of high rank, science, taste, and literature, as must make him look on these distinctions without envy, when beheld disconnected with those principles which alone render talents estimable.

In the history of this distinguished lady, we find these striking circumstances: they present a melancholy instance how completely in Paris, at that time, a disregard of all the obligations of duty, all sense of religion, all the charities of domestic virtue, all the purposes of social usefulness, was, on her part, perfectly compatible with her being received into the first society. On the part of her associates, all the objections, insurmountable, we trust, in any other place, were there sacrificed to the reigning idol—the fondness for display in conversation, the vanity of eclipsing those who eclipsed others.

We see also how little splendid talents contribute to the

* Speech of Condorcet to the Academy on the death of Monsieur De Tressan.

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felicities of the life, or to the virtues of the possessor. We even see that, when not under the control of sound principle, they awfully increase the present capacity for evil, and the responsibility of a future reckoning. Instead of promoting improvement, they carry contamination. In morals as well as in politics,

"Great power is an achievement of great ill."

Some of these brilliant societies fostered in their bosoms the serpents that were so soon to sting, not only their own country, but all Europe. Here were cherished those academical philosophers, wits, and political economists, who first sounded the alarm for the simultaneous extinction of thrones and altars; who first exhibited the portentous remedies for curing despotism by anarchy, and superstition by atheism; who sowed the first prolific seeds of those revolutionary horrors which so rapidly sprung up into the poisonous tree of liberty, and who hurled their arrows at the God of heaven, and erected on the meditated ruins of his kingdom the temple of the goddess of reason.

Previously to some of Madame du Deffand's numerous intrigues, she had been separated from her husband, on the ground which, it is presumed, the laws of England would not recognise as a lawful impediment—*that "he was a weak and tiresome companion!"* She was extraordinarily acute, but her acuteness, though it was frequently just, was always malicious. It is difficult to say whether she was more completely deficient in sensibility or principle. She possessed all the qualities which attract, but wanted all those which attach; or rather, she wanted no talent but that of turning those she possessed to a better account. Not possessing the female virtues, she either did not believe in their existence, or despised them. If she wanted any vice, it was that of hypocrisy; for she takes little pains to hide qualities which were not fit to be seen. If she possessed any virtue, it was frankness, which yet was often disfigured by coarseness, and not seldom counteracted by falsehood. She wanted all the good feelings of kindness, affection, and tenderness; and possessed in perfection all the bad ones of ill-nature, jealousy, and envy; but her ruling passion was a selfishness the most deeply rooted, and an egotism the most completely unconquerable.

The dark and hollow character which she takes little pains to conceal, is rendered more broadly conspicuous by the warmth of her coloring, the strength of her language, and the power of her wit, all frequently exercised in proclaiming her own impieties.

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It is a striking proof of the unrelenting rancor of her heart, that a friend, of the same class of character,* whom she had formerly loved as much as she could love any woman; one who had been her select companion in her own house fifteen years, but who had quitted her in disgust, and set up a *talking house* for herself, which drew away some of "the best feathers in her wing;"—on hearing the death of this rival lady, she only exclaimed, "I wish she had died many years ago, and then I should not have lost D'Alembert!"

We learn from her letters, that her splendid society was composed not merely of wits, philosophers, and academicians, but of women of rank, of nobles, and of statesmen, with one of whom she was connected. From those, it must be confessed, admirably written epistles, we profitably learn much of the hollowness of worldly friendships, much of the insincerity of mere wits and mere men of letters—of persons who associate together partly for the credit of having it known that they are so associated—who mix acrimony and adulation, venturing to indemnify themselves for their reciprocal flattery when together, by their cutting sarcasms when separated. Happily, the more we see of these communications, the more we are convinced that nothing but sound principle, "godly sincerity," a conquest over vanity, a triumph over egotism, an habitual struggle against selfishness, can establish an honorable, virtuous and durable friendship, or shed a benign lustre on the most polished society.

We repeat, that these reports are not industriously gleaned from rival parties, ill-informed journalists, nor even from virtuous writers, eager to expose the vices they detested; but from the principal performers in the scene, from a woman whose uncontrollable openness prevents her concealing her own vices.

We see, not without pain, her exposure of the faults of some of the associates whom she so sedulously courts, and so constantly abuses; we see the malignity which forces itself through all her endeavors to appear amiable in the eyes of the distinguished person to whom she writes; we see the corroding envy, the gnawing jealousy, and sometimes the obvious aversion to the individuals of a society, without which she cannot exist; which society probably entertained a reciprocal hatred of their flattering hostess, and yet could not exist without *her*. All this exhibits a scene, from which an unsophisticated English heart turns away, sickening with disgust.

* Mademoiselle de l'Espinasse.

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This unhappy woman, old, deaf, blind, repining, and impious, yet drew this accomplished society about her by their mutual fondness for conversation. They met without affection, they parted without regret; yet meet they must—they were necessary to each other, not for comfort, for they knew neither the name nor the thing; but society being an article of the first necessity for the support of existence, it must be had with companions hating, and hated by, each other. Under such circumstances, the fondness for society seems not so much a taste, as a raging appetite.

It is, however, a cheerless, heartless society, where persons of talents and breeding meet, not so much to enjoy each other, as to get rid of themselves. Intimacy without confidence, and intercourse without esteem, add little to the genuine delights of social life. Competition, while it inflames vanity, is no improver of kindness.

In a city like Paris, where men were wits and authors by profession, and ladies judges and critics by courtesy, nothing was considered as an exclusion from these societies but want of talents to amuse, or taste to decide. The poet produced his work, not, however, so much to be corrected as applauded; not so much to be counselled as flattered; he, in return, paying usuriously, in the same counterfeit coin, the honor conferred on him, and the benefit done him, by their proclamation of the beauty of his work; his fame, perhaps, suspended on the avowed patronage of a woman whom we, in our plain language, should call infamous. He is grateful to receive his imprimatur and his crown of laurel from fair and fashionable, but impure hands; and Paris resounds, next morning, with the immortality assigned him by the decision of this coterie.

All this might be very well, or at least would not be so very bad, if there were no future reckoning; but to see old age without consolation, dreading solitude as only less terrible than death; to contemplate loss of sight as only augmenting spiritual blindness yet to see the afflicted sufferer clinging to this miserable existence, and closing a life of sin with a death without penitence and without hope; to consider talents capable of great things abused and misapplied; a God not merely forsaken, but denied;—all these are images from which the sober mind turns away with horror softened by compassion. May every daughter of Britain say, with the patriarch of old, "Come not into their secret, O my soul; to their assembly let not thine honor be united!"

Some ladies of unimpeached morality were found in these

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coteries. True: yet we hope to be forgiven for saying, that they could have retained but little of that delicacy which should preserve the purity of society, when they make no scruple of mixing intimately with women whose practices they would not by any means adopt. In such society virtue withers, delicacy is impaired, and principle finally extinguished.

In this view it is impossible not to make a short digression, to observe with gratitude on the obligations of English society to our late venerated queen. Not to insist on the admirable example she set in her exact performance of all the domestic duties; her public conduct, in one important instance, will ever reflect honor on her memory; we mean her solicitude to prevent the impure mixtures to which we are now alluding. She raised, as it were, a rampart between vice and virtue; and her strictness in excluding from the royal presence all who had forfeited their claim to be introduced to it, had a general moral effect, by excluding them also from the virtuous society of others of their own rank. Discriminations of this nature are of incalculable value in preserving the distinctions between correctness and impurity, when no offender, though of the highest rank, can preserve the public dignity of the station she has dishonored.

> "'T was hard, perhaps, on here and there a waif,
> Desirous to return, and not received;
> But was a wholesome rigor in the main,
> And taught th' unblemish'd to preserve with care
> That purity, whose loss was loss of all."
>
> Cowper.

London also has had its select assemblies for conversation. They were neither trifling, dull, nor pedantic. If there were less display of wit, less pains to be easy, less study to be natural, less affectation of being unaffected, less effort to be unconstrained, there was more sincerity, integrity, and kindness. If there was a less perpetual aim at being ingenious, ingenuity was never wanting. If there were less persiflage and sarcasm, there was more affection, truth and nature. Religion, though not discussed, was always venerated, and no degree of rank or talent would have procured an introduction when there was any taint on the reputation.

The tone of social intercourse is at present, perhaps, likely to be raised by the recent adoption of more direct religious improvement in the private parties of some persons of rank and talents. But to return to Paris.

One instance more of the substitution of talent for virtue,

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and of the little regard paid to the absence of the one where the other abounded; one instance more, and we will relieve our readers, and carry them to breathe a purer atmosphere in better company. The celebrated Madame d'Epinay is described by one of her admirers,* who came in the order of succession next after Rousseau, not only as the most attractive, but most *discreet* of women! This discretion, which is his rather than hers, appears in his making her indulgence in forbidden gratifications consistent with her constant regard for public opinion, and the desire of reputation. He records, intentionally to her honor, that being above all prejudices herself, (that is, above the weakness of Christianity,) yet no one knew better what was due to the prejudices of others. She conformed, he observes, as scrupulously to old usages as to new opinions, and kept up the outward observances of the church as much as a woman of an ordinary mind could have done; that is, she was at once an infidel and a hypocrite. He proclaims to her glory, that, "without believing in any catechism but that of good sense, she never failed to receive the sacraments, painful as the stupid ceremony was, with the best grace imaginable, as often as decency, or the scruples of her friends, made it becoming." "Perhaps," adds her profane panegyrist, "there was as much greatness in receiving them with *her* notion of them, as there would have been in refusing them." Is it any wonder that, with such a conformity of principles, she obtained the prize of the academy, as well as the homage of the academician?

We are amused to think with what a contemptuous smile of pity these ladies, with all their allowed taste and learning, must, if they were consistent, have beheld the pictures of these obsolete wives, Andromache and Penelope, as delineated by the Grecian bard—pictures of female excellence and domestic virtue, which have drawn the tear of admiring sympathy from many a British eye. The poet has omitted to mention whether their valiant lords loved them the less for having spent the hours of *their* absence in scenes of bloody warfare or perilous adventure, in mournful solitude, cheating the time in simple occupations, yet such as served to keep up the memory of their beloved heroes; in one, by contriving decorations for a living lord, or, in the other, honoring the memory of the dead one, by preparing funeral honors for his father, ingeniously deferring the detested second nuptials by nightly unravelling the daily labor, and thus keeping her

* Le Baron de Grimm.

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promise of consent when the work should be finished, and preserving her fidelity to her lord by never finishing it.

What manly English heart would not prefer the fond anxiety of the Trojan wife, which led her in secret to the watch-tower to mark the battle, and tenderly seek to explore her husband so soon to bleed, to all the Aspasias of Greece, to all the Du Deffands, the De l'Espinasses, the D'Epinays, to all the beau ideal of the fancy, and all the practical pollutions of the life, of the "*bonnes societies*" of the metropolis of France.

But, happily, we need not go back to ransack antiquity for *examples* in the finely imagined females of Troy or Ithica, nor for *warnings* to the polished, but profligate courtesans of Athens, nor to the criminal countesse of Paris; we may find instances of the one, and a complete contrast to the other, nearer home. We need go no further for the highest examples of female dignity, talent, and worth, than are to be found in the private biography of our own country.

We could produce no inconsiderable number in the highest rank of women, who, if their names are not blazoned in the book of fame, will be recorded in more lasting characters in the book of life—who, if their memoirs are not spangled with their *bons mots*, have yet had their good actions and holy principles embalmed in the writings of their faithful Christian friends. But we shall confine ourselves to a very few.

The lady Mary Armyne, descended from the ancient earls of Shrewsbury, was eminently skilled in human, but especially in divine learning. But the remembrance of her talents, which appear to have been of the first order, is lost in that of her Christian virtues. Among numerous other instances of her pious exertions, she contributed largely to the support of a society for converting the Indians in New England, long before missions were thought of by her tardy countrymen. On hearing of the fatal massacre of St. Bartholomew, she instantly devoted a large sum to those exiled and destitute clergymen who had fled hither for protection. Her piety was as exemplary as that extensive benevolence of which it was the source.

In Birch's Life of the Hon. Robert Boyle, there is a most interesting account of Mary, countess of Warwick, of whom it is saying every thing to say that she was entirely worthy of being sister to that illustrious Christian philosopher. Of the eminently pious lady Frances Hobart, the ornament of the court of James the First, Dr. Collins has preserved an interesting memorial. A long and unwearied attention, for many

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years, to the bodily sufferings of her lord, could only be surpassed by her anxiety for his spiritual interests. Through the blessing of God she became the honored instrument of a total change in his character, who never named her by any other appellation but that of his "dear saint." This term had not then fallen into reproach.

Of Susanna, countess of Suffolk, it is impossible to say too much. For brevity's sake, however, we must restrict ourselves to one or two particulars in speaking of a life which was a constant series of secret piety and active benevolence. When near her end, which happened in her twenty-second year, she implored her lord, that whatever provision might be made for the fortunes or acquirements of her children, that they might be educated in the strictest principles of Christianity, in comparison of which she esteemed all worldly accomplishments as nothing. To her dying father, who had been inattentive to Christian duties, she administered such spiritual supports, that in rapture he praised God that he should live to receive his best religious consolations from his own child!

To the memory of the lady Cutts, the incomparable wife of the gallant lord Cutts, so distinguished at the siege of Namur, noble justice has been done in an admirable funeral sermon of bishop Atterbury, which we would recommend to every reader who has a taste for exalted piety or fine writing.

The lady Elizabeth Hastings was not less distinguished for superior talents than for eminence in every Christian attainment. She has been celebrated for both in the Tatler, under the very inappropriate appellation of Aspasia. No two characters could form a more perfect contrast.

But the time would fail to enumerate all the English ladies who have conferred honor on their country. Of those already mentioned all possessed considerable talents. Some were eminent for their skill in the dead languages; others for their knowledge of philosophy and the sciences; all for their high religious attainments. All were practical Christians—all adorned their profession by the strictest attention to the domestic, the relative, and the social duties.*

But what shall we say to Rachel, lady Russell? Many daughters have done virtuously, but thou excellest them all! She has unintentionally bequeathed us her character in her letters. Though there is little elegance in her style, there is all the dignity of wisdom and truth in her sentiments.

* For a full account of these, and many other equally eminent ladies, see "Memoirs of Pious Women."

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Many specimens of epistolary writing might be produced which excel these in the graces of composition, but few which surpass them in that strong sense, solid judgment, and those discriminating powers which were the characteristics of her intellectual attainments, as heroic fortitude, Christian humility, unshaken trust in God, and submission to his dispensations, were of her religious character. Such a combination of tenderness the most exquisite, magnanimity the most unaffected, and Christian piety the most practical, have not often met in the same mind.

An acute, but sceptical French writer, calls "magnanimity the good sense of pride, and the noblest way of obtaining praise." How well has the prince of pagan philosophers, by anticipation, corrected this tinsel phrase! "If thou art not good, thy magnanimity is ridiculous, and worthy of no honor." How did our sublime Christian sufferer practically improve upon both! "Seek not the honor which cometh from men, but that which cometh from God."

Whether we view this illustrious daughter of the virtuous Southampton taking notes on the public trial of her noble consort, concealing the tender anguish of the wife under the assumed composure of the secretary; whether we behold her, after his condemnation, prostrate at the feet of the unfeeling monarch, imploring a short reprieve for her adored husband, while the iron-hearted king heard the petition without emotion, and refused it without regret; whether we behold her sublime composure at their final separation, which drew from her dying lord the confession, "the bitterness of death is past;" whether we behold her heroic resolution rather to see him die, than to persuade him to any dishonorable means to preserve his life; whether we see her superiority to resentment afterwards towards the promoters of his execution, —no expression of an unforgiving spirit; no hard sentence escaping her, even against the savage Jeffries, who pronounced his condemnation, adding insult to cruelty; no triumph when that infamous judge was afterwards disgraced and imprisoned; if we view her in that more than temperate letter to the king a few days after her dear lord's execution, declaring that, if she were capable of consolation it would only be that her lord's fame might be preserved in the king's more favorable opinion:—had long habits of voluptuousness left any sense of pity in this corrupt king; or, rather, if a heart had not been forgotten in his anatomy, it must have been touched at her humble entreaty that "he would grant his pardon to a woman amazed with grief, to the daughter of

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a man who had served his father in his greatest extremities, and his majesty in his greatest perils:"—if we view this extraordinary sufferer under all these trials, while we admire the woman, we must adore the divine grace which alone could sustain her under them.

After this imperfect sketch, may we not say, that, for an example of conjugal tenderness, we need not go out of our own country for a perfect model? Portia swallowing fire because she could not survive her Brutus, the *Pœte, non dolet* of the faithful Arraia, as she stabbed herself, and then presented the sword to her husband, to set him an example of dying bravely; these heroic instances of conjugal affection, which have been the admiration of ages, are surpassed by the conduct of lady Russell; *they* died a voluntary death rather than outlive their husbands; Christianity imposed on *her* the severer duty of surviving hers—of living to suffer calamities scarcely less trying, and to perform duties scarcely less heroic. After weeping herself blind, after the loss of her only son the duke of Bedford, let us view her called to witness the death of her daughter, the duchess of Rutland. After seeing her dead corpse, let us behold her going to the chamber of her other daughter, the duchess of Devonshire, then confined in childbed, of which the other had just died. When her only surviving daughter inquired after her sister, the mother cheerfully replied, "I have just seen her out of bed!" It was in her coffin.

In whatever attitude, then, we consider the protrait of this illustrious lady, it is with fresh admiration. Each lineament derives additional beauty from its harmony with the rest, the symmetry of the features corresponding with the just proportions of the whole figure.

England's best Hope.

We have dwelt on the present and the past, as well with reference to our neighbors as ourselves. If we have shown that we have little regret in any still remaining difference between the inhabitants of the opposite shores, and much to fear from a growing resemblance between them; if we have successfully hinted at the grounds of our own real superiority, and the possibility of maintaining, and even increasing our greatness, to any extent consistent with human imperfection; if we have, in the two preceding chapters, anticipated what

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might be our ultimate degradation, whilst in the first we had pointed at the heights to which we may reasonably aspire; let us not think it unworthy our attention to inquire how we can alone answer our high destination, revive what we have lost, attain what more is within our reach, or having attained it, how we may perpetuate the inestimable blessing.

We have at length, though with a slow and reluctant movement, begun to provide a national education for the children of the poor. Prejudice held out against it with its accustomed pertinacity; knowledge would only make them idle, ignorance would preserve subordination, the knowledge of their duty would impede the performance of it. This last we did not perhaps say in so many words, but was it not the principle of our conduct? We put off the instruction of the poor till the growth of crime made the rich tremble. We refused to make them better till they grew so much worse as to augment the difficulty, as to lessen the probability of their reform. The alarm came home to the opulent. They were afraid for their property, for their lives; they were driven to do what had long been their duty not to have left undone. But they did it not till "the overflowings of ungodliness made them afraid." They discovered at length, that ignorance had not made better subjects, better servants, better men. This lesson they might have condescended to learn sooner from the Irish rebels, from the French revolutionists. We have at length done well, though we have done it reluctantly. We have begun to instruct the poor in the knowledge of religion.

But there is another class, a class surely of no minor importance, from whom too many still withhold the same blessing. If, as is the public opinion, it is the force of temptation which has produced so much crime among the poor, are not the rich, and especially the children of the rich, exposed to at least as strong temptations, not indeed to steal, but to violate other commandments of equal authority? Laws, without manners, will not do all we expect from them: manners, without religion, will be but imperfectly reformed. And who will say that religious reformation will be complete, whilst it is confined to a single class, or deemed at least a work of supererogation by some among the higher ranks? There are however, many honorable exceptions, the number of which is, we trust, increasing.

Why should the poor monopolize our benevolence? Why should the rich in this one instance be so disinterested? Why should not the same charity be extended to the children

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of the opulent and the great? Why should the son of the nobleman not share the advantage now bestowed on the children of his servant, of his workman, of the poorest of his neighbors? Why should not Christian instruction be made a prominent article in the education of those who are to govern and to legislate, as well as of those who are to work and to serve? Why are these most important beings the very beings in this enlightened country whose immortal interests are the most neglected?

The apostle tells us, that "he who provides not for his own house has denied the faith, and is worse than an infidel." If this be true of temporal, what shall be said of him who neglects to make "for his own" a spiritual provision? Does not he far more emphatically deny "that faith" which is violated even in the other inferior case?

If we have begun to instruct the poor with a view to check the spirit of insubordination, that spirit requires little less suppression in our own families. In all ranks it is the prevailing evil of the present day. The diminished obedience of children to parents, of servants to masters, of subjects to sovereigns, all spring from one common root—an abatement of the reverence to the authority of God. Fathers should therefore keep up in their offspring, as long as possible, a dependence on themselves, without which they will gradually shake off their dependence on their Maker. Independence of every kind, as it is the prevailing wish, so it is the most alarming danger. With filial obedience, obedience to divine authority will become connected; but the muzzle of domestic restraint shaken off, there will be no control of any kind left. Might not a more exact Christian institution help to arrest the same spirit which has, within a few years, so frequently broken out in our, in many respects, excellent public schools? We mean not altogether to censure the honorable seminaries. Do not the youth carry thither, rather than acquire there, this want of subordination? Is it not too often previously fostered at home by the habits of luxury, the taste for expense, the unrestrained indulgences, the unsubdued tempers, which so ill prepare them to submit to moral discipline? Laxity of manners and of principles act reciprocally: they are alternately cause and effect.

Tender parents are indeed grieved at the indications of evil dispositions in their children; but even worthy people do not always study the human character: they are too much disposed to believe this budding vice but accidental defect—a failing which time will cure. Time cures nothing; time

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only inveterates, only exasperates, where religion is not called in as a corrective. It is in vain to hope to tame the headstrong violence of the passions by a few moral sentences; the curb is too weak for the natural ferocity of the animal. If the most religious education does not always answer the end, what end is an education, in which religion does not predominate, likely to produce? How is the Christian character likely to be formed without the strict inculcation of religious principles, without the powerful discipline of religious and moral habits?

Parents are naturally and honorably anxious about advancing the interest of their sons; but they do not always extend this anxiety to their best interests. They prepare them for the world, but neglect to prepare them for eternity. We recal our words; they do not even make the best preparation for the world. Their affection is warm, but is short-sighted; for surely that principle which is the root of all virtuous action, of all the great qualities of the heart, of integrity, of sober-mindedness, of patience, of self-denial, of veracity, of fortitude, of perseverance in a right pursuit, is likely to produce a character not unqualified for the best services to society; for advancement in life, for fitness for the most useful employments, for adorning the most honorable situations; for we do not recommend such a religion as would make ascetics, as would abstract men from the business or the duties of life, or from the true enjoyments of society. There seems, indeed, little necessity for guarding against evils of which we see no great danger.

Gentlemen should be scholars; liberal learning need not interfere with religious acquirements, unless it be so conducted as to leave no time for its cultivation, unless it cause them to consider religion as an object of inferior regard. But no human learning ought to keep religious instruction in the back-ground, so as to render it an incidental, a subordinate part in the education of a Christian gentleman.

Some apology might be made for the natives of a neighboring kingdom for their contempt of religion, from the load of absurd and superstitious observances which degrade it. Though even *they* might have discovered, under these disadvantages, much that is good; for they have had writers who yield to none in elevation of sentiment, in loftiness of genius, and sublimity of devotion.* Yet the labors of these excellent men have left the character of their religion unaltered.

* What has been said here and elsewhere of France, and of the religion of France, has been said "more in sorrow than in anger," and with the sin-

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But we have no such excuse to plead for the contempt or neglect of religion. Here, Christianity presents herself to us neither dishonored, degraded, nor disfigured. Here she is set before us in all her original purity; we see her in her whole consistent character, in all her fair and just proportions, as she came from the hands of her divine Author. We see her as she has been completely rescued from that encumbering load under which she had so long groaned; delivered from her long bondage, by the labors of our blessed reformers, and handed down to us unmutilated and undefaced.

If every English gentleman did but seriously reflect, how much the future moral prosperity of his country depends on the education he may at this moment be giving to his son, even if his paternal feelings did not stimulate his zealous endeavors, his patriotic would.

May the unworthy writer, who loves her country with an ardor which the superior worth of that country justifies; who, during a long life, has anxiously watched its alternations of prosperous and adverse fortune; and who, on the very verge of eternity, is proportionally anxious for its moral prosperity, as she approaches nearer to that state, in view of which all temporal considerations diminish in their value; may she hope that her egotism will be forgiven, and her pardon be obtained for the liberty she is taking? May she venture to suppose that she is now conversing with some individual father of a family in the higher ranks of life, and, presuming that he would permit the freedom, address him, and through him every man of rank and fortune in the kingdom, in plain and bold language, with something like the following suggestions?

Let it be your principal concern to train up your son in the fear of God. Make this fear, which is not only "the beginning of wisdom" in point of excellence, the same also in priority of time. Let the beginning of wisdom be made the beginning of education. Imbue the youthful mind betimes with correct tastes, sound principles, good affections and right habits. Consider that the tastes, principles, affections, and habits he now forms, are to be the elements of his future character; the fountain of honorable actions, the germ of what-

g.s view of caution to our own country. However we deprecate the past, we shall still cherish the hope, that having witnessed the horrors of a political, we may one day hail the dawn of a moral revolution. A virtuous king, and an improving government, leave us not without hope that this fair part of the globe may yet rise in those essentials without which a country can never be *truly* great. May they eventually improve in "that righteousness which alone exalteth a nation!"

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ever may hereafter be pure, virtuous, lovely, and of good report.

In his education never lose sight of this great truth, that irreligion is the death of all that is graceful, and amiable, in the human mind; the destruction of all moral beauty. Its foundations are in the dust, and it is a vain attempt to hope to raise a noble superstructure on so mean and despicable a basis. Tell him, that the irreligious man never looks out of self. He is his own centre; all his views are low; he has no conception of any thing that is lofty in virtue, or sublime in feeling. How should he? He does not look to God as the model of perfection. He will act nothing that is holy, for he does not honor *his* commands; he will conceive nothing that is great, for he does not look to the Architype of greatness; there is no image of true grandeur in his soul. His mind will be reduced to the narrowness of the things to which it is familiarized, and stoop to the littleness of the objects about which it is conversant. His views will not be noble, because they are not excursive; they are confined, imprisoned, limited, entangled in earth and its concerns; they never expatiate in the boundless regions of immortality. He has no connecting link between himself and things

"Beyond this visible diurnal sphere."

His soul is cramped in the exercise of all its noblest faculties; his heart paralyzed in its best attempts after a fugitive, low-minded virtue.

There is no true elevation of soul but what the youth must acquire by the knowledge of God as revealed in his word; no perfect example but that exhibited to him in the character of his Divine Son; nothing but the gospel, through the grace of God, will check his corruptions, give him a sense of his accountableness, and raise his nature above the degraded state to which sin has reduced it.

It is material to reflect that nothing really preparative to his wellbeing in this life, and conducive to his qualification as an ornament to his country, will otherwise than forward him in his progress for another country, "even a heavenly." Adopt the measures which even nature and reason suggest for making him a distinguished member of human society, and it will not lessen your satisfaction, nor lower your gratitude, when you see that you have not only trained him to be a useful and virtuous citizen, but also a candidate for heaven.

Let your child be made familiarly acquainted with God's word, his providence, his controlling power, his superintend-

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ing eye. Let him be taught not barely to read, but to understand, to love, to venerate his Bible. Implant at a proper season, in his mind, the evidences of Christianity, in the clearest, simplest, and most explicit manner. Furnish him with arguments to defend it, for he will not fail to hear it attacked. Teach him to despise ridicule, that last resort of the bad defender of a bad cause; for he will find that those who cannot argue can sneer, and he may feel it harder to withstand the one than the other.

Inform him that in France it was the ignorance of religion which produced the contempt of it; and that both together overturned the state, by inculcating principles hostile to all virtue, fostering passions destructive of all order, and an impatience of control subversive of all government; all springing from one common source, all meeting in one common centre, a combination to throw off the government of God himself. Impress upon his young mind that important truth, that there can be no security for a state in which religion is not warmly yet wisely taught by its ministers, cherished by its government, and believed and reverenced by the people.

There are certain traditional sayings which claim a sort of prescriptive right to be received, which pass unexamined, and are credited as oracular. Guard him against these false and sordid, but popular maxims, which, though the press may be used chiefly by the lower orders, the things themselves are practically adopted, pretty equally, by "the great vulgar, and the small." Some vindicate speculatively loose principles, by the assertion that "thoughts are free." Tell your son this is not true. A Christian must endeavor to bring his thoughts to the same correct standard with his actions, and from the same awful motive, "Thou, God, seest!"

There is another popular but unfounded axiom respecting the use of wealth, namely, that "A man may do what he will with his own." Christianity denies this assertion also. Every man has indeed a legal right to the disposal of his own property, but religion interdicts his right to spend it in vanity or vice; or if he be exempt from these grosser temptations, she still abridges his right to monopolize it. Christianity expects that the deserving and the distressed shall come in for such a proportion of his wealth as an enlightened conscience shall dictate. The divine person who refused, in a legal sense, to be "a divider, or a judge," over a contested property, did not fail to graft on the question he avoided answering the imperative caution, "Take heed and beware of covetousness."

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There is another fatal lesson which he will learn in the world, and which the natural pride of his own heart will second; namely, that to resent an injury is a mark of spirit, while to forgive it shows a base mind. The prince of darkness, in his long catalogue of expedients, never invented a maxim which has brought more generous, but ill-disciplined souls to destruction.

The uncurbed desires, the unrestrained passions, to which we have before adverted, the contempt of submission, the supposed meanness of forbearance, the hot resentments not controlled betimes in the boy, may have been preparing the man for an act which may hereafter fill his whole life with cureless remorse.

Boys well-born and accustomed to well-bred society, have a sort of instinctive notion of *honor*, which is strengthened by the conversation to which they are sometimes exposed. Seize upon this spirit, whether instinctive or contracted, but seize it with a view to convert it to higher purposes. This popular notion of honor may seem to give dignity to the tone of his conversation, while it is inflating his heart with arrogance. It may indeed set him above doing an act which some fashionable men may agree to call base, but it will not preserve him from a duel, which these men agree to call honorable. But whatever acquittal a jury of the world's men of honor may pronounce on such a transaction, it will, by that awful decision from which there lies no appeal, by the definitive sentence of the great Judge of quick and dead, be pronounced murder; murder of one of them in the act, of both in the intention; murder as criminal as that which brings its vulgar perpetrator on the highway to his ignominious catastrophe.

Lay hold then on this high-minded feeling, and endeavor to direct it into a purer channel. Lead his aspiring mind to higher objects. Let the hope of the favor, and the dread of the displeasure of God, expel from his heart a too eager desire to court the applause or escape the censure of irreligious men, by acts which, while they would offend his Maker, would destroy his own soul. Let him learn to distinguish between the swellings of human arrogance, and the consciousness of Christian dignity. Worldly maxims of honor are timid, but they are not great.

There is no sure preservation from these mischiefs, but in an education formed on the religion of Jesus Christ. The principles drawn from the spirit of the gospel, conscientiously adopted, and acted upon, would subvert all the hollow and

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destructive maxims of the worldly code. How many boiling passions might have been cooled, how many disappointed hearts and mourning spirits healed, how many duels, how many suicides, (both now so dreadfully prevalent,) might have been prevented, by the early and unremitted application of this one grand specific.

Cultivate in your son whatever is valuable in science, or elegant in literature. Independently of its own intrinsic worth, it will, by filling up his time and engaging his thoughts, assist in setting his mind above low and sordid tastes, and leave him little leisure or relish for the base and grovelling pursuits of sensuality. A love of learning judiciously instilled, is amongst the most probable *human* preservatives from vulgar vice; though since it is human, it can go but certain lengths as to moral benefit; and we have witnessed many deplorable instances of its failure, in minds of the highest literary attainments, for want of being under the direction of a superior principle. It is, however, a most valuable auxiliary, not only in improving the intellect and refining the taste, but, as we have already observed, in rescuing so much leisure from inferior pursuits.

But learning, be it repeated, though it invigorates the mind, will not reform it. It is a shining ornament, but not of the nature of a corrective. Moral evil is not cured, is not regulated,—nay, it may even be inflamed by it, where intellectual science is made its own end, and not considered subservient to a higher. Learning will strongly teach him to despise what is worthless in composition, but will feebly lift him above what is unworthy in practice. It will correct his taste, but will not enable him to resist temptation: it will improve his judgment of the world, but will not secure him from its pollutions. Human learning will only teach him the knowledge of others, the Bible that of himself.

Let him therefore enter into the battle of the world armed with weapons from the divine armory; stoutly furnished with motives and arguments drawn from religion, of potency to fortify his resolutions, convince his understanding, and affect his heart. Let him see in your example that religion is neither unmanly or ungentlemanly. Accustom him not to hear the three dominant spiritual and intellectual sins, PRIDE, SELFISHNESS, and EGOTISM, treated with an indulgence not shown to such as are more disreputable, gross, and scandalous. Against both classes the whole artillery of the gospel is impartially levelled. Of the first, peculiar condemnation is intimated in Scripture. Of pride it is observed, that "God

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resisteth the proud," and that it is hard to be found fighting against God. Against selfishness it is specifically proclaimed, that "no man" with any pretensions to a Christian character "liveth to himself;" that we are not to "seek our own things," and that we must "bear one another's burdens." Against egotism a host of precepts present themselves in battle array, "to esteem others better than ourselves, to avoid vain glory, to look on the things of others; to be slow to speak, ready to hear."

Though these interior and mental sins are as much cherished by impiety as those which are coarser and more notorious, yet as the latter can produce no plausible pretence for their indulgence; as they cannot be qualified by any sophistry, nor covered by any artifice, they are less likely to hold out to the end. Morality is disgusted by vulgar vice, by the practical sins of the sensual man; but mere morality can never extirpate the vices of the heart and mind: it is not always her aim, nor if it were could she accomplish it.

In your conversation with the young person, do not be satisfied to *generalize* religion. Religion is an indefinite term, a vague word, which may be made to involve a variety of meanings, and to amalgamate a number of discrepancies. It may release a man from all the prescribed institutions of Christianity, it may set him loose from all its peculiar doctrines and restraints; turn him adrift, and dismiss him to his choice between the "Jehovah, Jove, or Lord," of the sceptical poet. Since life and immortality have been brought to light by the gospel, a *general* religion is no religion at all. His must be the religion of the New Testament. Be not ashamed to teach your son the gospel of Jesus Christ. If you believe that there is no other name under heaven by which yourself can be saved, you must be assured that there is no other salvation for your son. Defer not then too long to communicate to him the distinctive peculiarities of our faith. Other notions will occupy the space which you leave vacant. O! stamp the right impressions on his heart while it is soft, tender and ductile; and he will hereafter mix these early imbibed feelings, and sentiments, and principles, with his other sweet associations, his other pleasing recollections of the vernal season of life; cherished images! which the matured mind is fond of retracing, and which commonly remain vivid when most others have faded, or are obliterated.

Fancy not that these acquisitions and pursuits will blight the opening buds of youthful gayety; that they will check his vivacity, or obstruct his amiable cheerfulness. The ingenu

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ous, unvitiated mind is never so happy as when in a state of virtuous exertion, as when engaged about some object to which it must look up; something which, kindling its energies, raises its views; something which excites the ambition of lifting it above itself.

Much less fear that the pursuits here recommended will depress his genius; it will exalt it; his mind will find wider room in which to expand; his horizon will be more extensive; his intellectual eye will take in a wider range; the whole man will have an ample region in which to expatiate. To know that he is formed for immortality is not likely to contract his ideas, or to shorten his views. It is irreligion which shrinks and shrivels up the faculties, by debasing the spirit, and degrading the soul.

And if to know that he is an immortal being will exalt his ideas, to know that he is an accountable being will correct his habits. If to know that "God *is*" will raise his thoughts and desires to all that is perfect, fair, and good, to know that "God is the rewarder of all them that seek him," will stimulate him in the race of Christian duty; to know that there is a day in which God will judge the world, will quicken his preparation for that day.

As he advances in age and knowledge, impress upon his mind, that in that day of awful inquisition he must stand unconnected, single, naked! It is not the best attachments he may have formed, the most valuable societies to which he may have belonged, that will then stand him any stead. He must therefore join them now with a pure and simple intention; he must not seek them as something on which to lean, as something with which to share his responsibility; this is his own single, undivided concern. It is vain to hope that by belonging to any society, however good, to any party, however honorable, he can shrink from his own personal, individual accountableness. The union of the laborers gives no claim to the division of the responsibility. In this world we may be most useful among bodies of men; in the great judgment we must stand alone. We assist them here, but they cannot answer for us hereafter.

From his Bible, and from his Bible only, let him draw his sense of those principles, of that standard by which he will hereafter be judged; and be careful ever to distinguish in his mind between the worldly morality which he may learn from the multitude, and that Christian holiness which is the dictate of the Scriptures, and of the Scriptures alone. Teach him to discover there,—he cannot discover it too soon,—that it is not

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a set of proverbial moral maxims, a few random good actions, decorous and inoffensive manners, the effect of natural feeling, of fashion, of custom, of regard to health, of desire of reputation, that will make a truly valuable character. This is not to be acquired by certain popular virtues, or rather fractions of virtues; for there is no integral virtue where there is no religion. Pleasing manners will attract popular regard, and worldly motives will produce popular actions; but genuine virtue proceeds only from Christian principles. The one is efflorescence, the other is fruit.

After all, though you cannot by your best exertions, seconded by the most fervent prayer, without which exertion will neither be rightly directed nor successfully prosecuted, command success; yet what a support will it be under the possible defeat of your fairest hopes, that you strove to avert it! Even if, through the prevalence of temptation, the perverseness of his own nature, and the malignity of his corruptions, the barbarous son *should* disappoint the best founded hopes of the careful parent; what a heartfelt consolation would it afford you, under this heaviest of all trials, that the misconduct of the child is not imputable to the neglect of the father! The severest evil—and this perhaps is the most severe—is supportable, when not aggravated by the consciousness that we have contributed to bring it upon ourselves. Though it will not pluck the sting from his guilt, it will render the poignancy of your own anguish more tolerable.

But let us indulge higher hopes and brighter prospects for our country. We refer to those hopes with which the first chapter of this little work concluded, namely, the rich provision which God has put into our hands for accomplishing his great designs in our favor. The hope therein expressed, and the means humbly suggested for accomplishing it, was the re-formation of the British character. We have here, feebly indeed, but honestly, shown what obviously appears to be the best security, the most effectual barrier, against the vices and contamination of our prolonged continental intercourse. Religious education, with God's blessing upon it, which every truly Christian father will not fail to invoke, is all in all towards the restoration, the elevation of our national character. And let it never be forgotten, that it is the education of the rich which must finally determine the fate at once of rich and poor; and by consequence, which must determine the destiny of our country.

Here then is Britain's last, best hope; and when we consider

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the unparalleled advantages we possess in a learned and orthodox clergy, who instruct us in the sanctuary, and who preside over our public and private seminaries, why need we despair? Why need we doubt, that the Christian religion, grafted on the substantial stock of the genuine British character, and watered by the dews of heaven, may bring forth the noblest productions of which this lower world is capable; though neither the security nor the triumph will be complete till these "trees of righteousness" are transplanted into the paradise of God.

Reader, if you are indeed a Christian father, anticipate in idea that triumphant moment, when, having cast your crown at the foot of the eternal throne, you shall be called upon to give an account of your own conduct, and, as far as had depended on you, of that of your offspring. Think of the multiplied felicities of meeting, in the presence of God, those whom your example and instruction have, through his grace, contributed to bring hither! Think what it will be, to be able, amidst all the hosts of heaven, amidst the innumerable company of angels, and the spirits of just men made perfect—think of be able to say to the Universal Father, "Behold, I and the children thou hast given me!"

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ON DOMESTIC ERRORS IN OPINION, AND IN CERTAIN PRACTICAL HABITS.

On Soundness in Judgment, and Consistency in Conduct.

As a preliminary to the following pages, the writer begs leave to observe, that it consists rather of miscellaneous observations on a variety of topics, than in an attempt at a systematic view of religion or morals. It does not pretend to present an exhibition of Christian doctrine, or to prescribe the duties of a Christian life. It is presumed that the generality of readers who shall honor these pages with their attention, are already, in a greater or less degree, religious characters; consequently, standing in little need of such information as her humble talents could have imparted. But as religion is become a subject of increasing and more general interest, it may not be unseasonable, as we proceed, to point out some of the dangers to which the less advanced Christian may be liable, as well as some of the evils which may subsist with high outward profession. To those who are beginning to see the importance of religion—and of such persons, adored be Almighty goodness! the number is rapidly augmenting—to those interesting characters, may the writer venture to address a few words of affectionate and respectful counsel? Carefully encourage the first dawning dispositions of piety in your heart, cherish every indication of a change in your views and an improvement in your sentiments. Let not the world, nor the things of the world, stifle the new-born principle, nor make you ashamed modestly to avow it.

But while you cultivate this principle by every possible means, avoid the danger of fancying that your religion is confirmed when it is scarcely begun. Do not conclude that a complete change has been effected in your heart because there is a revolution in your opinions, and a favorable alteration in your feelings. The formation of a Christian character is not the work of a day; not only are the views to be changed, but the habits to be new-moulded; not only is the

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heart to be convinced of sin, but its propensities are to be bent in a contrary direction. Be not impatient, therefore, to make a public disclosure of your sentiments. Religion is an interior concern. Try yourselves, prove yourselves, examine yourselves, distrust yourselves. Seek counsel of wise, established, sober Christians. Pray earnestly for more light and knowledge, and especially for perseverance. Pray that you may be able to go on with the same zeal with which you set out. Of how many may it be said, "Ye did run well—what hindered you?" You ran too fast; your speed exhausted your strength; you had not counted the cost.

Carefully distinguish between the feverish heat of animal fervor, and the vital warmth of Christian feeling. Mere youthful energy, operating upon a newly awakened remorse for a thoughtless life, will carry the mind certain lengths; but if unaccompanied with humility, repentance, and a continual application for a better strength than your own, this slight resource will soon fail. It is not that principle which will encourage progress; it is not that divine support which will carry you on to the end. The Christian race is not to be run at a heat; religion is a steady, progressive course; it gains speed also; progress quickens the pace; for the nearer the approach to the goal, the more ardent is the desire to reach it. And though, in your further advance, you may imagine yourself not so near as you did when you first set out, this is not really the case; you have a lower opinion of your state, because you have obtained higher views of the spirituality of the law of God, and a more humbling sense of your own unworthiness. Even the almost Christian prophet seems not to have been previously so deeply convinced of sin, as when, overwhelmed by the glory of the divine vision, he exclaimed, "Mine eyes have seen the King, the Lord of Hosts!"

The person who addresses you has seen some promising characters sadly disappoint the hopes their early stages in religion had excited. By taking too high a tone at first, they not only lost all the ground they had gained, but sunk into indifference themselves, accompanied with a prejudice against serious piety in others. They not only became deserters, but went over to the enemy's camp. Avoid this error. The world is too much disposed to impute rashness, presumption, and enthusiasm to the purest and most correct religious characters. In your instance let them not be furnished with any ground for this censure by your deserving it. If you advance, you glorify God, and promote your own

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salvation; if you recede, you injure the cause you now intend to serve, and bring upon yourselves a fearful condemnation. Self-abasement, self-examination, and prayer, are the best preservatives for all who have entered on a religious life, and are especially becoming incipient Christians.

There is one thing we would more particularly press on the important class we are now taking the liberty to address; *it is the cultivation of a sound judgment.* Of all persons religious persons are most bound to cultivate this precious faculty. We see how highly the great apostle of the Gentiles valued it. In directing the spiritual labors of his beloved young friend, in stirring him up to every good word and work, he does not forget this exhortation: "*The Lord give thee a right understanding in all things!*" Again he prays for his beloved Philippians, "that their love may abound more and more in *knowledge* and in all *judgment.*" And in his epistle to the youthful bishop of Crete, he repeats the admonition to young persons of both sexes to be *sober-minded.* These admonitions acquire great additional force when it is considered, that he who gave them was a man of exceeding ardency of temper, and of zeal without a parallel. This experienced saint must have frequently seen the danger of imprudent piety, of self-confidence, of a zeal not regulated by knowledge; and therefore presses the great importance of a *sound judgment.*

Judgment is to the faculties of the mind what charity is to the virtues of the heart; as without charity the latter are of little worth, so without judgment talents are of little comparative use.

Judgment, with the aid of God's Spirit, and the instructions of his word, is the balance in which qualities are weighed, by which the proportions of our duties, and the harmony of our virtues, are preserved; for it keeps not only the talents in just subordination, but the principles in due equipoise. When exercised in subservience to the divine rule, the faculty becomes a virtue, and a virtue of a higher order. It restrains irregularity, it subdues vanity, it corrects impetuosity, it checks enthusiasm, and it checks it without diminishing zeal.

One of the most powerful defenders, not only of our church polity, but of our church doctrines, has had the renown of all his great qualities so absorbed in the quality we are recommending; or, rather, this was so much the faculty which maintained his great talents and qualities in their due order, that we never read the name of Hooker without the

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previous application of this weighty epithet—THE JUDICIOUS.

Judgment is so far from being a cooler of zeal, as some suppose, that it increases its effect by directing its movements; and a warm heart will always produce more extensive, because more lasting good, when conducted by a cool head.

We speak of this attribute the more positively, because it is one which, more than many others, depends on ourselves. A sound judgment, indeed, is equally bestowed with other blessings by him from whom cometh every good gift; yet it is not, like the other faculties of the mind, so much born with us, as improved by us. By teaching us to discern the faults of others, it warns us to avoid them; by detecting our own, it leads to their cure. The deepest humility is generally connected with the soundest judgment. The judicious Christian is watchful against speculative errors, as well as against errors in conduct. He never adopts any opinion because it is new, nor any practice because it is fashionable; neither does he, if it be innocent, reject the latter merely for that reason. Judgment is, in short, that quality of the mind which requires to be kept in ever wakeful activity; and the advantages it procures us will be more apparent the more it is kept in exercise.

Religious charity more especially demands the full exercise of the judgment. A judicious Christian will double the good done by his selection of the object, and his manner of relieving it. All things that are good are not equally good. A sound judgment discriminates between the value of the claimants which present themselves, and bestows on them more or less attention, according to their respective claims.

Above all, an enlightened judgment will enable you to attain and to preserve CONSISTENCY, that infallible criterion of a highly-finished Christian character, the want of which makes some really religious persons not a little vulnerable. It was this want in some of his people, which led an eminent divine, at once a man of deep piety and lively wit, to say, that "there were some good persons, with whom it would be time enough to be acquainted in heaven." So much to be regretted is it, that goodness of intention is not always attended by propriety in the execution.

In another class, the want of consistency makes not a few appear over-scrupulous as to some minor points, and lax in others of more importance. These incongruities not only

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bring the individual into discredit, but religion into disgrace. When the world sees persons, whose views are far from high, act more consistently with *their* avowed views, and frequently more above them, than some whose religion professes to be of a loftier standard, they will prefer the lower, as exhibiting fewer discrepancies, and less obvious contradictions.

Consistency presents Christianity in her fairest attitude, in all her lovely proportion of figure, and correct symmetry of feature.—Consistency is the beautiful result of all the qualities and graces of a truly religious mind united and brought into action, each individually right, all relatively associated. Where the character is consistent, prejudice cannot ridicule, nor infidelity sneer. It may, indeed, be censured, as holding up a standard above the attainment of the careless. The world may dislike, but it cannot despise it.

In the more advanced Christian, religion may seem to be less prominent in parts of the character, because it is infused into the whole. Like the life blood, its vital power pervades the entire system; not an action of the life that is not governed by it; not a quality of the mind which does not partake of its spirit. It is diffused through the whole conduct, and sheds its benign influence, not only on the things done, but on the temper of the doer in performing them. The affections now have other objects, the time other duties, the thoughts other employments. There will be more exertion, but with less display; less show, because the principle is become more interior; it will be less obtrusive, because it is more rooted and grounded. There will be more humility, because the heart will have found out its own corruptions.

By the continual exercise of the judgment, and an habitual aim at consistency, the Christian, though animated, will be orderly. He will be less subject to the ebullitions of zeal, as well as to the languors of its decay. Thus, through the joint operation of judgment in the intellect, and principle in the heart, the religion is become equable, regular, consistent.

There never was but one visible exhibition of infallible judgment and complete consistency. In that divine person who vouchsafed to pitch his tent among us, and to dwell with men on earth, that he might give us a perfect example in his life, before he obtained salvation for us by his death—in HIM alone was judgment without any shadow of error, consistency without any speck of imperfection. His divine perfections none can approach; but all may humbly imitate those which come within the compass of his humanity.

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On Novel Opinions in Religion.

Among the numerous innovations of this innovating age, it is deeply to be lamented that religion should come in for so large a portion. Of this we have a melancholy instance in the system of the new secession. Many are distorting the sacred doctrines, and slighting the practical ethics of the New Testament. The religion of the gospel is employed to furnish arms against itself. The truth, as it is in Jesus, is fearlessly controverted; its sanctity is no security; its divine authority is no protection.

In the new system—strange to say!—the hardihood of the sceptic is adopted for the professed purpose of purifying Christianity. The dogmatism of the unbeliever is employed for improving our faith in the religion which the unbeliever denies!

This heterogeneous system, composed of different elements, made up of conflicting principles, unhappily is not brought forward by the avowed opposers, but by the professed and zealous friends of Christianity;—by religionists placing themselves much above the standard of their former pious associates, with whom they once went to the house of God as friends; by Christians so critically scrupulous, that they can no longer go to that house at all.

Novelties in the sciences and in the arts may be, and generally are, beneficial. Every invention may be an improvement; but in religion they are delusions. Genuine Christianity is not, as one class of men seem to suppose, a modern invention; serious piety is no fresh innovation. "That which was from the beginning declared we unto you," are the words of inspiration; the new and living way, therefore, now so much depreciated, is only a continuation in the good old way so long ago recommended by the prophet.

Nor is Christianity, as the recent party seem to suppose, a superannuated thing, which wants repairing; nor is it an incomplete thing, which wants filling up; nor is it a redundant thing, whose excrescences want lopping; nor a defective thing, whose deficiencies must be supplied; nor an erroneous thing, whose errors must be expunged.

But to do these malecontents justice, they do not resemble those reformers who are contented to expose the defects of an existing system, without providing a remedy. This restoration, this purifying, this repairing, this expunging,

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this lopping, this grafting, this perfecting, they have actually and gratuitously taken into their own hands, with a view either to improve the old religion, or, as their progress rather threatens, to produce a new one; while the champions of the antiquated system all agree that "the old is better."

Some Christians of the primitive ages were not then, perhaps many of the present age are not now, aware, that he who overleaps the truth, errs as widely as he who falls short of it; nay, the danger is even greater, as it is more difficult to recede than to advance. It was the vain desire of overturning established truths, of being wiser than the wisdom of God, of being more perfect than the perfection of the gospel, of giving new glosses to old opinions, and rejecting all opinions which did not hit their own distempered fancies; together with the temptation of being considered as the founders of a new school,—which gave rise to the Ebionites, the Cerinthians, the Marcionites, and various other sects; and which has continued, to this day, to introduce successive heresies into the church of Christ.

Of the two classes above mentioned—those who think true religion a novelty, and those who are endeavoring to introduce a novel religion, though they are the very antipodes of each other, yet it is difficult to determine which has wandered most widely from the truth. Scylla has its wrecks as well as Charybdis. Though each thinks that the only way to safety is to recede as far as possible from the other, yet, by this increasing desire of mutual recession, they are in more danger of gradually approaching to each other, if not of finally meeting, than either intended or believed at first setting out.

In one quarter we hear the most consoling of all doctrines—the doctrine on which the great hinge of Christianity turns,—rejected as false, and its defenders derided, as if they were adopting it to be a substitute for virtuous practice. We hear one community spoken of by its professors as triumphantly bearing away from all others the proud distinction of *rationality*. It is a monopoly not to be allowed. If by rational religion is meant a religion singularly adapted to rational beings, no church on earth has a fairer claim to the appellation than the church of England. It is rational to exercise our reason in examining and weighing the evidences of Christianity; and, having clearly proved the authority on which they are grounded, it is then rational to submit our reason to its doctrines. It is rational to believe that we are apostates from our original brightness; not only

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because we perceive it to be a scriptural doctrine, but because we see it in all around us, and feel it in all within us.

It is rational for a being conscious of its weakness, to desire to lean upon something that is strong; we therefore lean upon a rock, and that rock is Christ. Our church is a rational church; for it is sober without coldness, and animated without enthusiasm. Its service unites the affections of the heart with the faculties of the mind; it teaches to pray with the spirit and with the understanding also. Though it lays hold with a firmly grasping hand on the blessed doctrine of the atonement, yet it is so far from using this doctrine as a pretence for neglecting virtuous practice, that it draws from thence new motives, new sanctions, new encouragements. It teaches that without shedding of blood there is no remission for sin, while it declares that without repentance, and without holiness, there is no salvation for sinners.

The sound members of this church acknowledge that there are mysteries in our religion; but the same reason which employed its best energies in proving the divine authority of Scripture, has convinced them that the secret things which belong to God must be adored now, and will be fully understood hereafter. The legitimate members of the church, —for she has, it is to be feared, some spurious ones—are not surprised that in a revelation from heaven there should be mysteries, but they believe that these sacred mysteries are meant as exercises of faith to the probationers for heaven; are meant to promote humility; which *they* consider, whatever others do, as a grand fundamental in religion. They do not pretend to know in what manner the Holy Spirit operates upon the human heart, but they know that it does operate, because it produces that change of heart which they are not ashamed to call the renewing of the Holy Ghost, and which distinguishes the vital from the nominal Christian. They leave to those who have sufficient natural resources in their own minds, if such there be, to reject assistance which *they* fervently implore; assistance without which they who think they stand may finally fall.

These humble dependents on divine grace come at length to attain, in addition to the external evidences of Christianity, an internal evidence in their own bosom, which, so far from giving them any elation of heart, any eccentricity of doctrine, any irregularity of conduct, preserves them from each, while it affords them "all joy and peace in believing."

But while we put in the fair claim of our church to rational religion, we do not make an exclusive pretension to

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this, or any other excellence. Every human institution bears on it some marks, greater or less, that it is human, of course imperfect; but it is sufficient to guard *us* against the folly of such a pompous assumption, to know that an erroneous church not only assumes the appellation of *infallible* itself, but gives it also to its infirm, mutable, human head, to a being certain of death, and liable to sin.

But if we do not claim soundness as well as rationality for our exclusive possession, we are more likely to perpetuate both, than the best societies of separatists. All that is good in our church is likely to be secured to it by the fence of an establishment. An inclosure is not so likely to be broken in upon from without, as a society planted in the waste. We are likely, I say, to be secured from the introduction of new dogmas, as well as to be preserved in our long adopted principles. The pale which encircles our church, and the formularies which belong to it, do not leave it open to the experiments of new projectors, to the incursions of fresh innovators. Above all, it is enriched by a great mass of the divine treasures of Scripture, the spirit of which is also expanded in our collects and prayers; so that, as we have observed in another place, if the pulpit should in any instance unhappily degenerate in doctrine, the desk will still furnish a perpetual antidote. It may indeed deserve the name of the *establishment*, not only as being the rational religion, but as being built on the foundation of the everlasting gospel, on the doctrines taught by prophets and evangelists, Jesus Christ himself being the chief corner-stone.

In another of the quarters alluded to, the more novel system, we hear much of opinions, but little of practice; much of doctrines, but little of holiness; much of faith—a disproportioned and unproductive faith—but little of repentance. These grand ingredients, which, when severally coupled together, make up the sum and substance of Christianity,—these joint essentials, which St. Paul preached invariably, and which by never separating he preached effectually, are now considered as separate interests, and severed from each other as having no necessary connection.

We are very far from the injustice of accusing those who propagate doctrines which are evidently unscriptural, of being themselves unholy. In some of the leading characters we fully believe the contrary to be the case; but the obvious effect of such doctrines on those who hear them, is not only to lessen their value for practical preaching, but to lead them to consider personal holiness as making no part of the things which accompany salvation.

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Those who are at all acquainted with ecclesiastical history, must know that in the most flourishing ages of the church, even when Christianity was best understood and most successfully practised, errors of opinion most readily started up, the ephemeral fungus of a luxuriant soil; they were frequently the suggestion of fanciful and mistaken, rather than of immoral men. Our great spiritual adversary, who successfully employs the *vicious* as the corrupters of morals, knows it to be a stale and fruitless device to make them his agents for misleading the judgment and bewildering the imagination; and therefore, by a refinement of ingenuity, prompts the more virtuous to the accomplishment of spiritual mischiefs. Moral men are his selected instruments for broaching novel, enticing, and dangerous opinions. These moral but wayward persons seem to have overlooked the fine supplication of the apostle, that God would "establish, strengthen, settle them." These terms, which indeed are not synonymes, but shades,—these terms, a noble climax, implying not equality, but gradation, are now inverted. Every move in the new machine seems to shake, weaken, unsettle. One pin in the old system is pulled out after another, till the whole magnificent fabric, if its security depended upon them, would fall to the ground. The patriarch Jacob has shown us, in the character of his vacillating son Reuben, how destructive instability is of excellence.

We are assured that the changes in these ever varying theories are so frequent, that to confute them would be as difficult as unnecessary; for that which by some of the party is insisted on in one week, gives way in the next to some wider deviation; so that he who might wish to animadvert on some existing evil must be as rapid as its inventor; he must

"Catch, ere it fall, the Cynthia of the minute."

If in religious contemplation or discussion we once give the reins to fancy, if we cherish every seducing thought, merely because it is new, if we set up for complete independence of opinion, if we assume individual release from all the ties that hold Christian society together, if we permit ourselves to plunge into the unfathomable ocean of discovery, without compass or rudder, there is no saying where we may land; it may be on the shore we now dread. Many of these leaders differ in opinion, but each seems to lay as exclusive a claim to truth as the pope himself; but as the latter was equally infallible when there was one pope at

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Avignon and another at Rome, so the infallibility here seems to be lodged by each in himself, only with this variation, that these last begin by differing from each other, till in their more advanced progress they come to differ from themselves.

Is not the recent secession founded on a kind of spiritual democracy, an overturning system; an aversion to whatever is established; a contempt of authority; an impatience of subordination; a thirst for dictatorship; with this difference, that these religious dissidents loose the reins of their self-government, instead of those of their country?

We know to what a degree the love of novelty, the longing to see any thing they have not seen before, though the object be ever so disgusting, is carried by our countrymen. The poet who best knew human nature, who best painted the characters of Englishmen, said, "In England any monster will *make* (be the making of) a man." This is so true, that a dwarf, a giant, an unnatural birth in an animal, will afford delight; the greater the distortion the higher the pleasure. We have seen to what excess this passion for what is novel and monstrous may be carried, in the instance of a late preposterous prophetess, a creature born and bred among the dregs of the people, with nothing to recommend her but ignorance, presumption, extravagance and blasphemy; yet did this woman not only make numberless proselytes among her vulgar equals, but obtained advocates among those from whom better things might have been expected. But it is the very absurdity which is the attraction. Such preposterous pretences being obviously out of the power of human means to accomplish, the extravagance is believed to be supernatural. It is the impossibility which makes the assumed certainty. The epilepsy of Mahomet confirmed his claims to inspiration.

Extravagance in religion is a kind of spiritual empiricism which is sure for a time to lay hold on the vulgar. The ignorant patient in both cases, who frequently pays little attention to the established physician, is sure to be attracted by any new nostrum from the laboratory of the irregular prescriber; he is resorted to with more confidence in proportion to the reputed violence of his catholicon; and he who despised the sober practitioner, swallows without scruple the most pernicious drug of the advertising professor.

Without the slightest desire to detract from the personal character of our new empirics in divinity, we may be allowed to suspect that their education, and early habits of life,

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had not altogether qualified them for the arduous undertaking of new-modelling a church. It is true, that "the erudition of a (common) Christian man" is not required to be very profound, but surely that of a Christian reformer should be something more than moderate.

The lapse of three centuries has added little clearness to the lucid exposition of Christian truth as exhibited in the writings of those reformers by whom the doctrines of the church of England were modelled. Whatever defects might have escaped the notice of those eagle-eyed sifters and examiners of Christian truth, when they rescued it from the rubbish under which it lay almost buried, would not these defects have been detected, pointed out, rectified, by the penetrating mind of bishop Jewel in his renowned challenge at Paul's Cross, or in his celebrated Apology for the Church of England? Would they not have been expunged or purified by the judicious Hooker, that bulwark of the establishment, in his immortal writings on *ecclesiastical polity*, and on *justification?* Would they have eluded the observation and correction of archbishop Usher, that prodigy of erudition?

We need not be again told the well-known fact, that there may be abundant learning where there is little enlightened piety; but in these glorious champions of the faith of Christ, and of the Protestant church, learning was only a secondary excellence. Various and profound as were their acquirements, they were conscientiously devoted to the purpose of advancing and confirming the scarcely established church. Can we believe that Ridley, Hooper, Grammer, and a long list of such distinguished men, would have made the sacrifices they actually made, without scrupulously examining into the momentous truths they professed to believe; that they would have suffered the most cruel tortures, rather than renounce the doctrines of a church to which they were first ornaments and then martyrs? "There were giants in those days:" but to say no more of them, nor of the succession of profound divines and eminent scholars who succeeded them, "men of stature also,"—would it not be casting a severe reflection on those bright luminaries of our country and church, to believe that the great truths of the gospel which were hid from these skilful and acute indagators, were reserved to be brought to light by half a dozen persons in the nineteenth century; that to men, most of them bred to secular pursuits, and living antecedently in secular habits, should be reserved the honor of detecting, not trifling faults, not imperfections, from which perhaps no human institution is exempt, but sin

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dical errors, but fundamental mischiefs, affecting the very vitals of our religion? If these evils really exist, if they indeed escaped the penetration, eluded the vigilance, and mocked the wisdom of those mighty champions, then to say those holy men were blamable is saying little; they were indeed idiots, voluntarily to suffer a violent death, rather than renounce a church too erroneous for the new reformers, not only in which to preach, but in which to remain.

The penetrating sense of Luther seems not only to have exposed all existing, but to have anticipated all future heresies, especially when he inveighs against that which declared that "*the ten commandments ought to be taken out of the church!*"

The Coryphœus of the doctrine of faith, in contradiction to the new system, says: "Faith is by no means an ineffective quality, but possesses so great excellency, that it utterly confounds and destroys all the foolish dreams and imaginations of sophisters; but if works only are taught, faith is lost." "But if nothing but faith is inculcated, carnal men begin to dream that there is no need of good works." Again: "If indeed faith saves us without works, let us have no anxiety about good actions; let us only take care and believe, and we may do what we please. It is true," adds he, "that Paul tells you, that faith without works justifies; however, he also tells you, that a true faith, after it has justified, does not permit a man to slumber in ignorance, but that it worketh by love." Again: "You now see, that though it is faith alone which justifies, yet that faith alone is not sufficient."

There is not a single doctrine of the New Testament which does not involve practical consequences. The necessity of holiness, now unhappily not insisted on, is more exalted by the death of Christ than by all other means that ever were devised. God's hatred of sin is more forcibly expressed by the sacrifice of his Son, than it could have been by any other method, although we do not presume to set limits to infinite power.

Yet this most glorious doctrine, this cleanser from all sin, may be converted by the manner in which it is administered into an open door to that licentiousness which it is its special design, its obvious tendency, and when truly received on scripture grounds, its natural consequences, to cure.

But if men came to the perusal of the Bible with certain prepossessions of their own, instead of a simple and sincere desire after divine truth; if, instead of getting their obliqui-

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ties rectified by trying them by this strait line, they venture to bend the strait line till it fits their own crooked opinions; if they are determined to *make* between them a conformity which they do not *find*, they are not far from concluding that they *have* found it. By such means, a very little knowledge, and a great deal of presumption, has been the ground-work of many a novel and pernicious system.

Systems, indeed there will be as many as they are novel and pernicious; for though men are as tenacious of error, for a time, as if their convictions were as strong as they could be if it were truth, yet the persuasion of error is not likely to be so lasting. As no error can be so irresistible as a known truth, it cannot long carry the same weight with it. He who adopted it, at length finding it not to go, as we say, on all fours, is more likely to plunge into a succession of errors, each deeper than the other, than to return to the truth which he has abandoned. Whether the pride of not going back, or the hope that, in his wider wanderings, he may extricate himself, it is hard to say; for error is as endless as truth is powerful. Some minds are so constituted, that it is easier to them to produce objections to truth, than to embrace it; they therefore resist truth, when they might resist the obstacles which prevent their receiving it. Our adoption of error as naturally proceeds from our abuse of reason, as our adoption of truth from the right use of it. The question, to a plain Christian, seems to be settled by this declaration of our Lord: "He that doeth his will shall know of the doctrine, whether it be of God."

As, in many of those to whom we have been alluding, their aberrations seem to have been occasioned rather by the vagrancy of the imagination than the corruption of the heart, we are not without hope that they may yet retrace their steps; that the way they have lost may be recovered; that their involution in this labyrinth may not be past extrication; that divine grace may furnish a clue to lead them back to the plain, obvious, intelligible meaning of the unsophisticated word of God. That this may be the case, is the cordial wish and prayer of many who loved and respected them before they were unhappily led astray, by erratic fancies, into these seducing theories.

There is no method which the subtle adversary of mankind has not devised to injure religion. When the church is at a low ebb; when she is sunk in forms and outward observances; when zeal is asleep, and all seems safe because all is still, he sometimes rouses her, but it is to wrong pur-

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poses: it is not to advance the interests of Christianity, but to bend his force against some symptoms of its returning spirit, which begin to break out. These symptoms of incipient zeal he calls enthusiasm, though an evil which perhaps, in that stage of the church, does not exist. He, however, strives to prevent the existence, not of enthusiasm, but of zeal, that the frigid may enjoy their doze, and not be reproached by the threatened exertions in the quarter which is beginning to open its eyes.

At another period, when the church is beginning to be triumphant, he sends out his favorite engine, persecution, with his fagot and his axe, burning where he could not refute, and subduing by force what he could not silence by argument.

He is now pursuing a different course. The same malignant spirit which once labored to drive men from Christianity by martyrdom, now draws them from it by sophistry. He now deteriorates truth instead of persecuting it; and as the process is less revolting, it succeeds better. Men are no longer terrified into error, but coaxed into it. They are not frightened, but wheedled out of their belief. Their understandings become so bewildered, that they are persuaded that every new advance in heresy is a fresh step towards truth. Advantage is made even of their prejudices, which become more deeply rooted by the very change which they are made to believe is to extirpate them. New converts, who once valued themselves on their incredulity, have become credulous to excess; and those who were previously indifferent to sober religion, are led to swallow the wildest perversions of Christianity, to adopt opinions which she as heartily rejects as she did their former unbelief.

Some subjects are placed out of the reach of the human mind. Presumptuous spirits lose themselves by attempting to pierce through forbidden bounds; by endeavoring to explain things beyond the limits of created comprehension, they subvert the truth they pretend to serve, they involve themselves in the very difficulties they undertake to clear. The humble Christian, like the seraphim, "covers his face" before the infinite Majesty of heaven, and exclaims, "O the depths of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God!" "Verily thou art a God that hidest thyself."

We are not called upon to unravel intricacies, but to hold fast the form of sound words. While to the ill-informed these new teachers appear profound because they are unintelligible, they remind those of better judgment of certain

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animals, who, burrowing in shallow ground, just beneath the surface of the earth, fancy they are deep only because they are dark.

Many a metaphysical reformer, by the manner of conducting his system, so exposes and defeats his own cause, as to resemble in fate, though we say not with any similarity of invention, the Neapolitan atheist Vanini, who, with eleven others of the same class, (we presume the number to be a match for the twelve apostles,) endeavored to establish a regular college of infidelity. The object was nearly the same with that of the late atheistical school in France; and by having the priority of two centuries, they robbed that recent rabble of the meritorious claim to original wickedness.

Vanini's object was to exterminate the very idea of a God, and for this he adopted a most singular method. He undertook to prove there was no God by stating the general idea of God. He strangely fancied that to define the idea was to destroy it; and that to pretend to say what God is, was the surest way to disprove his existence! His definition is so artfully made out, and part of it so ingeniously written, that while he thought he was drawing only the creature of his imagination, it appears as if he were enthroning rather than deposing his Creator. A marvellous delusion to argue against the being of God from the very magnitude of his perfections! Let the delirious metaphysics of modern times alone, and we had almost said they will also argue themselves into the abyss of forgetfulness.*

We want more simplicity in the exercise of our religion; we want to be reformed by it, and not to reform it; we have need to be sent back to our first rudiments. We should imitate the plainness and uncomplicated method of the New Testament, where the doctrines are few, but of importance inestimable, infinite, eternal! We should examine the grounds of our faith by this unerring guide, and not by the pullulations of our own visionary fancies. We want to be sent back to elementary principles. We need not even think it beneath our wisdom to be directed by that familiar summary, the Apostles' Creed. It were well if we fixed our own faith by the articles comprised in, and inclosed by, that safe compendium, instead of turning it over to our children, as if we were got above its beggarly elements. Even the way faring man cannot stray while he is contented to keep close within this hedge.

* For a further account of this metaphysical atheist, see Mr. Saurin's sermon on "The deep things of God."

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Many do not virtually adopt its first simple declaration, "I believe in God;" for to believe in God on the Christian scheme, is not merely to believe in a first cause, is not merely to believe in his existence; we must also believe in his attributes, his promises, his threatenings, his Son, his word, his Spirit; to believe in those attributes especially which harmoniously meet in the glorious union of truth and mercy, the blessed combination of righteousness and peace in the person of his Divine Son; those promises which are eternal life to as many as keep his commandments; those threatenings which say to the ungodly, "Depart from me, I never knew you;" that holiness without which no man shall ever see his face.

A bad principle is of much more extensive mischief than a bad example; the latter, it is true, like a conflagration, has a tendency to destroy whatever comes within its reach; but a pernicious principle, like the variolous matter, may be conveyed to any distance, and infect the patient, though he had never come in contact with him from whose eruption it was taken. "It is time for thee, Lord, to lay to thine hand, for they have destroyed thy law."

But it is not the entertaining a dangerous opinion, it is the rage of proselyting to new opinions, which constitutes the most malignant part of the mischief. An erroneous doctrine not propagated, hurts none but him who holds it; but by propagating it to unsettle the minds of multitudes, to deteriorate the gospel, and to disturb the peace and unity of the church, is surely no light evil, especially in a country like ours, proverbial for its credulity and love of novelty; and in a church like ours, which has been reformed, sifted, and purified, beyond the example of any other in the Christian world.

The everlasting edifice of the gospel is founded on a rock, whose stability neither storms can shake, nor waves undermine. Nor can any contrivances of man improve the beauty of its superstructure. Its depths cannot be fathomed by our short line, nor its height fully apprehended by our short sight! Christianity then is no appropriate field for the perplexities of metaphysics, nor the industry of new discoverers. This brief title of the Bible—THE WORD OF GOD, excludes the censures of all cavillers, annihilates the emendations of all critics!

It is with unfeigned sorrow the writer has witnessed the rise and progress of the new community. If she knows any thing of her own heart, the preceding remarks have not been dictated by a censorious spirit. But it may be said she was

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not called upon for any such impertinent animadversions. The probability of such a reproof makes her feel herself obliged to account for the liberty she has taken.

Those who have condescended to look into her former writings, need not be reminded, that she has through life, in a considerable degree, though not exclusively, devoted her humble talents to the service of her own sex; and has conscientiously, though feebly, labored to be useful to their best interests in every way she could devise. She has endeavored to strengthen them in the pursuit of what was right, and they have had the goodness to bear with her when she has reminded them of any aberrations from that pursuit.

Though the deep interest she has taken in their credit and their welfare has by no means invested her with a right of interference on the present painful occasion, yet it would not have been consistent with her antecedent practice to overlook a circumstance in which they are so deeply involved.

It has excited the most lively feelings of regret in many minds, to hear, in a recent instance, of the departure of some ladies of consideration from that reserve and delicacy so peculiarly the characteristics of their sex, and so naturally appendant to their own respectable characters and situation in life. They appear not only to have entered very warmly into all the tenets of the seceding school, but to labor very assiduously for their propagation. They are, it seems, not only followers, but joint leaders in the several departments of the government of the seceding party.

Tenderness of heart, warmth of feeling, and liveliness of imagination, form a most interesting part in the composition of an amiable woman; but the qualities which adorn are also the qualities which mislead. The very attractions which cause them to please may become snares. If not carefully directed, they give a wrong bias to the character, and a dangerous tendency to the conduct. They lead their possessor more widely astray than is commonly the case with those who are destitute of these pleasing powers.

That providential economy which has clearly determined that women were born to share with men the duties of private life, has as clearly demonstrated that they were not born to divide with them in its public administration. If, then, they were not intended to command armies in war, nor to direct cabinets in peace, to legislate in the senate, or debate at the bar, doubtless they were not intended to be public teachers of religion, to be makers of canons for a new church, nor to invent dogmas to controvert an old one; nor to be profes-

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sors of proselytism, nor wrangling polemics, nor conductors of controversy, nor settlers of disputes—disputes which will continue to be agitated as long as men have hot heads and proud hearts; as long as they posses vanity or curiosity, impatience of restraint, or a love of opposition; a weariness of sober truths, and a thirst after the fame to be acquired by their subversion.

Why will women of sense, then, defeat their providential destination? why desert their proper sphere, in which they were intended to benefit, to please, even to shine, at least as stars of the *second* magnitude? Why fly from their prescribed orbit? Why roam in useless and eccentric wandering,

"And, comet-like, rush lawless through the void,"

and then, having for a season astonished with their false and momentary blaze, fall disregarded and forgotten?

These well-meaning ladies would be among the last to use their allotted measure of grace and accomplishment to any purpose which they believed to be improper; yet they require to be told, that neither should their talents be exerted to the purposes of spiritual seduction; that they should not be employed to disturb the faith, to shake by dispute, or weaken by persuasion, the steadiness of persons who, without their endowments, are perhaps in a safer state.

But though the writer cannot hope that these observations will produce any effect on those who have already embarked on this sea, without a shore, and without a bottom, happy would she be, if they might become the means of preserving one inexperienced female from the perils to which novelty, curiosity, and pressing invitation, too easily allure. The sure preservatives from this danger are to cultivate deep humility and self-distrust, to keep clear of the very threshold of innovation, to avoid the first step; for all the subsequent ones are easy. Let her bear in mind, that, once seduced, she may find, that "when she would inherit the blessing, she may be rejected, and find no place of repentance, though she may seek it carefully with tears."

Ill effects of the late Secession.

Among the evils to which the late secession has contributed, those we are about to mention are of no light nature. It has been the means of exciting a sort of spiritual vanity, of awak-

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ening a desire of departing from received opinions, in certain young persons, who may be designated by the name of premature instructers. It has increased the alienation of the lower orders from the church; it has afforded to some who are not favorable to serious piety, a pretence for indiscriminately classing together men of different views, characters, and principles. Among the more respectable, it has stirred up a spirit of debate and controversy by no means friendly to the cause of genuine Christianity. We shall mention these effects in their order.

There is scarcely a greater mistake in morals, than is committed by those who habitually speak of vanity as a trifling fault, as a small pass not worth guarding. There is perhaps scarcely an error which is so generally adopted, and so carelessly overlooked. It finds its way into characters of every species, and almost into every individual of the species. There is not only the vanity of beauty, of rank, of riches, of learning, of talents, but, as we have already observed, the vanity of religion.

A bold familiarity with Scripture, an unhallowed touching of the sacred ark, not as formerly by sceptics and scoffers only, but by persons professing, and we believe intending to be religious, are, it is to be feared, becoming too common. This, like many other of our offences, has its foundation in vanity. It is obvious that an unwillingness to be taught, and an impatience to teach, marks the character of the present day.

There is a scion from this presumptuous stock, which perhaps has not had sufficient time to grow, in order to become generally known, but which is beginning to sprout up in certain provincial towns and villages. There is a growing disposition in a few arrogant young men to read the Bible with their own glosses and interpretations, and to aim at proselyting, and "taking captive" not only "silly women," but silly girls. Several of these persons, as soon as they began to open their eyes on the importance of religion, or rather before they were broad awake to its truths, have undertaken this gratuitous tuition. Instead of taking time to promote their own advancement, instead of learning wisdom by an increasing discovery of their own ignorance; instead of improving in Christian knowledge by the only legitimate methods, diligent study of the Bible with the aid of the soundest commentators, both accompanied with fervent prayer for that light they profess to seek,—without consulting able ministers, without taking this straight and obvious road, on their

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own very slender stock they set up for teachers themselves. Instead of looking to the experienced and the wise, they collect a little group to look up to them; thus inverting the apostle's observation, for *they*, "when for the time they seek to be teachers, have need to be taught themselves, which be the first principles of the oracles of God." If this spiritual vanity should flourish, we shall soon have none to learn: all will be teachers.

Thus the raw and rash Christian confidently jumps over all the intermediate steps between the inquirer and the instructer, and despising the old gradual approach to the sacred temple, despising the study of books, of men, and of himself, starts up at once a full-grown divine; the novice seizes the professor's chair, erects himself into a scholar without literature, and a theologian without theology. On the strength of a few texts, ill understood, and worse applied, he undertakes to give his young neighbors new views of the Bible, and without eyes himself, sets up for a guide of the blind.

These young persons in reading the Scriptures seem to be setting out on a voyage of discovery of something new, rather than on a course of observation on what their precursors have done for them. They search, not with devout inquiry, but fearless curiosity; they look out for passages written in a different connection, and applied to different purposes, and then try to prove that they produce not consecutive reasoning, that they do not establish the generally received doctrines. How should they? They were never intended to produce the one, or to establish the other. They bring together propositions which have no relation, and which require different proofs, and then triumph in the supposed opposition of what was never intended to agree.

'Thus fools rush in where angels fear to tread.'

Suffer a few friendly hints. Though Holy Scripture was given to be searched, it was not given to be criticised. It was "written for our learning," not for our cavilling; it was given not to be pertly scrutinized, but to be "inwardly digested;" not to make us wise in our own conceits, but "to make us wise unto salvation." It is not to be endured to hear questions on which hang all our hopes and our fears, speculated upon as if they were a question of physics or history, and explained till they become contradictions.

Men taught of God, and possessing those depths of erudition which qualified them to teach others, depend upon it,

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have left nothing for your discovery except the discovery of your own insufficiency. If there are obscurities they will not be cleared by such shallow expositors. The sun of righteousness will not be made to shine brighter by the light of your farthing candle.

Boldness in religion, we repeat, is one of the great evils of the present day. The more we cavil the less we shall obey. We may explain truths till we come to deny them. We may be so involved in intricacies of our own weaving, that we may end by opposing the doctrine we undertook to clear. Oh! there is no security like a humble mind; a mind always distrusting its own wisdom, and always confiding in the wisdom of God.

Why, then, will not the premature instructer wait till he is himself instructed? Why not look up for information on difficult and disputed points to wiser and older heads? Why not in their little parties turn their attention to practical points, rather than to speculative niceties? Why not cultivate that self-inspection and heart-humbling prayer which would cure those conceits that lead to a critical, and often end in a sceptical spirit? such habits would best preserve them from that inflation of heart which arises from the vanity of some supposed new discovery in a religion which was given us by the Spirit of God.

The Scripture nowhere teaches us to indulge this audacious curiosity; it stirs up no eagerness for pushing speculation beyond its legitimate bounds. It furnishes no invitation for ranging beyond the limited sphere allotted to our imperfect human condition. Its incitements are not irritations, but encouragements. The Bible wisely represses all that spiritual vanity which would dive into unprofitable, because impenetrable mysteries. It teaches us all that is necessary for us to learn, and there it stops. It teaches what is of prime importance for us to know,—that we are fallen creatures. It shows what we ought to *believe* in order to our being rescued from this state of apostasy. It instructs us in all that is necessary for us to *do* to be restored to the favor of God, which by sin we had forfeited. It is enough that it lays open the disease, presents the remedy, and offers God's Holy Spirit to render it effectual. In short, it reveals all that as probationary beings we should desire to know, and of all we know it expects us to make a practical use.

The present is, especially among the lower ranks, an age of rebuke and blasphemy: and what is so likely to augment the popular hostility to Christianity, and neglect of the esta-

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blished church, which is founded upon it, as when they see some of its ministers reprobating at one time the church which they warmly defended at another?—when they see them actually renouncing it as unchristian, and setting up a new system in opposition to it? Where, then, is truth to be found, may not even the more sober amongst the people say, if it is not found in that church, in defence of which so many of her divines, so many of her bishops, were led to the scaffold and the stake? Will not the loose and careless be likely to be confirmed in impiety, when they see these men, who were fostered in her bosom, who had subscribed to their belief in her articles, who had been warm beyond their fellows in the admiration of her liturgy, her doctrines, and her discipline,—when they see these men not only desert her altars, but take up arms against her; when they behold a perpetual conflict between Christian ministers?—for a church that is attacked must be defended—will they not think that an establishment which is so frequently assailed, which requires such continual vindication, from which there are so many recent deserters, must needs be an erroneous and unsound church, and even the Scriptures on which it is founded uncertain, if not false?

What is so likely as this defection to give confidence, without the least intention of doing so, to that spirit of infidelity which used to skulk in corners, and stab from behind a mask, but now avows itself boldly, bares its unblushing front to public gaze, spurns at law as well as decency, openly defies government, whom it used to fear, as well as God, whom it never feared?

Was it not enough that these low, designing demagogues —men who think one religion as good as another, and no religion best of all,—was it not enough that these open violators of order, truth, and justice, should, as the most probable means to accomplish their political mischiefs, endeavor to overturn the church by bringing her creeds, and her other holy services, into contempt; insulting, by their profane parodies, all that is grave, and rendering ridiculous all that is good? Yet, from such men, such attempts excite our regret and astonishment less than those we have been contemplating. How grievous is it, when persons of a totally different description are, perhaps undesignedly, contributing to help on the work which, we are persuaded, they abhor!—when decorous and religious men, though by other devices, and with other weapons, may be contributing to accomplish the work of these vulgar politicians, and assisting, in no inconsiderable

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degree, to discredit the church which the others are laboring to subvert!

Nay; in one respect the better men are doing the worse deed; for the factious assailants of the church injure those alone who were injured before; for, by the grossness of their attacks, they shock all who are not totally given up to impiety; while, in the present instance, those more decent characters are more likely to be led astray, who have shown some disposition to be serious; and are, therefore, in more danger of being misled by the specious subtleties, and the assumed tone of confident security, of these religious dogmatists.

The inexperienced and the wavering—those who are unconfirmed in their principles, together with others who have their religion to seek, and who like to have one pointed out to them which will not disturb their repose by the severity of its practical injunctions, nor the self-denying spirit of its tendencies, are likely to be led astray by these false lights; while the sober and self-distrusting Christian will only be driven, by these alarming novelties, to adhere more closely to the humbling and consistent doctrines of the New Testament, —will, with deeper prostration of heart, implore the aid of the Holy Spirit, not only to lead him into all truth, but to *keep* him in it. Such a one will find that it does not require profound knowledge, or deep learning, to perceive the awful dangers of the presumptuous innovations which lead to those perilous subtleties, which terminate in these bold conclusions. He will see that common sense, an humble mind, and a competent acquaintance with Scripture, are all that is wanting to discover that the Bible and the novelties of the seceding community cannot both be right.

But the evil does not end here; for some of the adversaries of serious piety are, it is to be feared, disposed to take a most unfair advantage of this secession; and the very circumstance of that separation which ought to have rescued men who firmly adhere to the church, and to the principles on which it is founded, from suspicion, increases it, and causes them to be involved in one common charge of extravagance and error with men whose opinions they abhor: whereas, when the vessel is assailed by an unexpected storm, instead of throwing themselves out to sea in quest of imaginary safety, the tempest only makes the experienced Christian mariner cling the closer to his hold. Men of more than ordinary zeal and activity, then, should not be suspected of disaffection, unless they afford other, and more substantial reasons, for doubting their want of orthodoxy. Does it not look as if

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there were no soundness but in apathy, no security but in inertness?

One of the great evils of the times is rash judgment, indiscriminate attack, and a zeal for censure without examination; a not separating men who are materially dissimilar, but lumping them into one common reprobated mass, or, at best, speaking as if the difference were so little, that it was not worth the pains to separate them.

Perhaps there are no church communities in the world that do not hold some doctrines in common. We are identified in some important points with the church of Rome; but that does not blind us to its errors, nor does it prevent our keeping clear of them. There are both rational and orthodox communities in our own country; but our holding some opinions in common with them, neither makes us adopt those opinions which we disapprove, nor condemn those who profess them, as if they held none that were right. Why, then, should not the case be the same in our own church?

This lumping system is not a little hard on the steady and orderly divine. It weakens the hands of the faithful pastor, when his auditors, who have just been hearing him speak the words of truth and soberness, find him, perhaps, in the next controversial pamphlet they take up, coupled with the half insane, and the wholly absurd. It is hard that the zealous Christian, who is at the same time a pattern of propriety and correct demeanor, should be dragged in to make common cause with those at whose principles he shudders. Yet these men of opposite characters, principles, and pursuits, are forced into contact, are together plunged into the crucible of undistinguishing prejudice, and melted down together; all distinctions so lost in the fusion—the sober Christian so mixed with the fanatic, the temperate with the fiery, the regular with the eccentric, that they come out of the furnace blended into one common mass, and are reproduced as if formed of one common material.

Ours is also pre-eminently an age of controversy. Is not charity sometimes recommended with uncharitableness, and religion vindicated irreligiously? But are there not a thousand other subjects better calculated for its legitimate exercise? "Let the potsherds strive with the potsherds of the earth" on all other topics; but here, though one dash the other in pieces, he does not always escape unhurt himself. But shall the word of "the High and Holy One, the word of him who sitteth on the circle of the earth," be made an arena for the combats of its puny inhabitants, whom the prophet represents by the most contemptible insect?

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But although, as we have already observed, if truth be attacked, it must be defended, the Christian controvertist never engages in offensive war. He does not fight for victory, but truth. And the surest way for him to ascertain this, is, to examine the temper with which he defends it. Rivalry is not his motive, nor is railing his weapon.

If, as it is said, warfare is the natural state of man, let his hostility among Christians be directed to a foreign enemy; let them not engage in civil war. You have already "provoked each other to good works," which is part of the law; go on, and provoke each other to "love, which is the fulfilling of the law." Let both sides rejoice in the good done, without caring which does it. "There are diversities of operations, but it is the same God which worketh all in all." If there is so much done separately, what a mighty mass of good would be produced by cordial co-operation? Let me not be accused of levity in applying the words of the poet,

> The Douglas and the Percy *both together*,
> Were confident against a world in arms.

We know that in the sight of God he is not the most successful champion who may have given most falls to his adversary; but he who has obtained the most victories over his own spirit. And *he* will be found, in the great and tremendous day of reckoning, to have been the most valiant soldier of Jesus Christ, not who has been the fiercest combatant in the field of controversy, but who shall have brought most glory to God, and most souls to heaven.

If we made, as surely we ought to make, the Holy Scripture our standard of judging, as well as of believing, of charity as well as of faith, of brotherly kindness as well as of orthodoxy;—if we brought the Bible to be the constant arbiter of our debates, as well as the professed rule of our lives, we should attack nothing with warmth but what that Bible condemns. All differences of opinion in which God has not set to his seal that it is false, should be treated with candor; men should not then make their own "purged eyes" the universal medium of clear vision, they should not vilify others for seeing the same topics with other optics. Want of charity is probably no less a fault than the one we may be reviling; and does not a want of discrimination, or rather does not that blindness which is inspired by prejudice, lead to that deficiency in candor which widens the difference? To profess opinions of which Scripture neither commands nor prohibits our belief, ought not to set at irreconcilable variance beings who are equally candidates for heaven. In that abode of

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perfect peace and perfect love, no small portion of the promised felicity may arise from our being of no party.

A difference in opinion on points on which the Holy Spirit has been silent, on which no declaratory sentence in Scripture has been pronounced, is surely no ground for the triumph of superiority in those who maintain them, nor for supercilious contempt in those who reject them. Is it not putting matters of minor importance in the place of essentials? while perhaps by the disputants on both sides essentials are not always held with so firm a grasp, or at least are not debated with such unkind pertinacity.

We have hitherto alluded to difference of opinion between pious men, men who are in earnest in their religion. But are there not men of little piety to be found, who side with one or the other party, and become the hottest controvertists, while they take little real interest in vital religion; who oppose without belief, and defend without conviction, merely because they wish to be appended to that side which they happen to think the most creditable, most popular, or most profitable?

Let us then love in each other now what God loves in us, and bear with the rest. The cultivation of this spirit of kindness would so sanctify the temper, that we should forgive and overlook those inferior matters in others, which might not exactly coincide with our own views and opinions.

These discrepancies in sentiment are perhaps permitted for mutual advantage; and the cultivation of a candid disposition may be carried to a wider extent, and a spirit of forbearance in action, than if there were no such thing as diversity of sentiment. By the constant and reciprocal operation of this spirit of Christian kindness, we shall be made more meet for that state where all will be of one mind, as well as one heart, where charity will have its full consummation, and forbearance its full reward.

Let us then prepare ourselves, and each other, by the exercise of the one for the fruition of the other. Let God be all in all now, as he will be hereafter, and there will be no room left in the heart of a Christian for animosity, or unkindness towards his fellow-Christians. A cordial agreement in those essentials to which the gospel has annexed salvation, should swallow up all the present petty, but dividing distinctions. Could this most desirable object be accomplished, then should we hope to see a renovation of that spirit which, in the early ages of the church, provoked even its enemies to exclaim with admiring wonder, *See how these Christians love one another!*

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On the Exertions of Pious Ladies.

We are now about to tread, which we do with a fearful and timid step, on tender ground. It is with mingled respect and reluctance we venture to touch on certain delicate points which affect the sincerely pious; persons who equally avoid all eccentricity in doctrine, and negligence in practice; yet among whom little errors may hereafter creep in, the very consequence, perhaps, of that increasing and inestimable blessing, religious society. It is to be feared they may incur the hazard of raising in others objections against religion, by their honest zeal to promote it.

The persons to whom we presume to allude are of that sex, in which, perhaps, most piety is to be found, and who are in so many respects essentially advancing its cause. Their services are so materially useful, that it would be a subject of deep regret, if, by any slight inadvertence, their value should ever be diminished. We are too often led to complain of *deficiencies* in religion; we are now to speak—not of its excess, for we believe there is no such thing—but rather to guard the truly pious against the possibility of inconveniences, which, should they arise, would be a diminution of their usefulness.

The thoughtless and dissipated indeed, who haunt unsocial crowds, and lay out their talents for that world which they have chosen for their portion, find their reward where they seek it, in the admiration of that world where they flutter and shine. The others patiently wait for theirs in that single sentence, "Well done, good and faithful servant." Yet though it is painful to say a syllable which might look like disapprobation when only caution is intended, may we hazard a few words, not of censure, but of friendly intimation?

May not those large portions of time, and strength, and spirit, so generously spent abroad by zealous Christians, in the most noble exertions of religious charity, be sometimes suffered to intrench, in some measure, upon the imperious calls of domestic life, upon those pleasing and sacred duties for which HOME is a name so dear? May they not be so exhausted by external concerns, that they may be in danger of entering with diminished interest on the retired exercises of the closet. All business, even religious business, is apt to produce a hurry and bustle in the mind, and an agitation in the spirits, which the most serious persons lament, as being at-

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tended with some disqualification for personal improvement. "My mother's children gave me their vineyards to keep, but mine own vineyard have I not kept," was the pathetic lamentation of the ancient church. They had engaged her in labors and difficulties which she feared had in some measure impeded the progress of her own spiritual concerns. It was in her own house, at Bethany, that Mary sat at the feet of Jesus. We fully admit, however, not only the complete *compatibility*, but the expediency of uniting what we owe to those abroad and to ourselves and families at home; the highest characters are those who combine both. We are not combating, but applauding, a zeal which we fervently hope may never be suppressed, if it should ever require to be somewhat regulated.

There is no part of Christian duty which more requires us to look well to the motive by which our actions are set agoing. It is of importance to examine whether our most useful, if busy pursuits, are not influenced by a natural fondness for bustle, an animal activity, a love of notice; whether even the charitable labors grow not more from a restless spirit than from real piety. Let us observe, however, that though these defective motives may at first excite the zeal of some, yet by a perseverance in well-doing, assisted by humble prayer, the motive may at length become as pure as the act is undoubtedly right.

It is asserted, but we trust with more severity than justice, that there is a growing tendency in some truly excellent persons to introduce show and display in their religion; a tendency not quite consistent with the interior, spiritual nature of Christianity. It is not so much an evil *we* are guarding against, as the appearance of evil. Their sex, like their religion, is of a sober character; and the tendency to which we are alluding may create a suspicion that religion, even among good people, is not so much considered as a thing between God and their own soul, as we know it really is; for we are far from suspecting the secret communion with their God and Savior is not considered as their primary duty. And we are willing to believe that the effect of this duty will always be visible in producing that sobriety and simplicity, which so conspicuously, and so beautifully distinguish the religion of the New Testament

The religion of Jesus is utterly without parade, it affects no publicity. It is enough for his servants to believe that their heavenly Father, who sees them in secret, sees them with an approving eye.

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As they have got above acting from the fear of man, the next step is to get above acting for his praise; the excessive applause and commendation of their Christian friends begin, in reality, still more to be watched against than the reproach of the irreligious. The one teaches them to be circumspect, the other may in time induce them to believe that circumspection is no longer necessary. This negligence, if it do not make them do wrong, may lead them to be too much elated with doing what is right.

But there are higher motives for the use of discreet reserve in the Christian's mind than what regards merely their personal character. However pure in motive, however innocent in action, they must be careful not to have their good evil spoken of. They must be scrupulously cautious of not bringing the least reproach on the cause dearest to their affections. Pious persons cannot but know, that with the utmost care to avoid adding to the offence which Christian truth, however discreetly exhibited, necessarily gives, that many are looking out for pretences to discredit not only the professor but the profession itself. But if they should hereafter see any of those improprieties for which they are looking out; if any indiscretion should be found where it is sedulously sought, Christianity would suffer, and impiety triumph.

We sincerely hope that certain sharp-sighted observers, who are keenly on the watch for any thing that may discredit serious piety, who are peeping in at every crevice through which they think they may detect any real or supposed ground of censure, may never be gratified with the discovery of what they so industriously seek. But it is obvious, that where they can detect no substantial fault, they take comfort in finding a foible; where there is no deformity they triumphantly carry away a blemish, and are ready to make the most of the slightest imperfection. And a speck which would not be perceived in an ordinary form, is conspicuous on that which is white and pure.

This, by a little perversion, and not a little exaggeration, not only of fact but of conjecture, is propagated till it becomes a mischief. In the detection of the slightest flaw in characters of eminent piety, they go away rejoicing, as if they had found some hidden treasure. And it is well perhaps, even for the best Christians, that there are such critical inspectors; and the knowledge that they are watched will answer an excellent purpose, if it set them on watching themselves.

Am I then an enemy to Christian exertion? God forbid! It is the glory of our age, that among the most useful and

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zealous servants of our divine Master, are to be found of "devout and honorable women not a few." Ladies, whose own education not having been limited to the harp and the sketch-book, though not unskilled in either, are competent to teach others what themselves have been taught; who disdain not to be employed in the humblest offices of Christian charity, to be found in the poorest cottage, at the bed-side of the sick and dying; whose daughters, if not the best *waltzers*, are the best *catechists;* whose houses are houses of prayer, whose closets are the scene of devout meditation; who, not contented with the stinted, modish measure of a single attendance on public worship, so contrive to render the hours of repast subservient to those of duty, as to make a second visit to the temple of their God; and who endeavor to retain the odor of sanctity, shed on the sacred day, through the duties of the week.

But to pursue the subject in a different, though not distant direction, we cannot too much commend those valuable persons, whom neither fortune, rank, nor any temporal advantages have been able to seduce to follow those vain pursuits, whose light and, in some cases, dangerous amusements are so eagerly sought by the votaries of pleasure. We cannot but admire, that all these energies which others are wasting in idle diversions, or employments little better than idleness, are, by those excellent persons, devoted to purposes of religion, and religious or useful charities.

If, indeed, like the females attached to the new school of theology, they deserted the established proprieties, and prescribed decorums, which have ever been considered as the safeguard, as well as the ornament, of their sex; if they assisted to propagate novel opinions; if they undertook to share the office of directors in spiritual concerns; if they diverted to public purposes the talents given them for the more appropriate and subordinate, but not less useful offices of private life; if they attempted to clear difficulties in divinity, which the wisest and most learned men had approached with awe and reverence, and had receded, for fear of "darkening counsel by words without knowledge;" if they undertook to decide between contending creeds while they considered the commandments as antiquated—new-modelling the one and rescinding the other without ceremony; if they allowed themselves to determine the right and the wrong on points too abstruse, not only for female, but even for human intelligence, to decide upon, and to get rid of those they did not like or did not comprehend; if they had quitted plain, practi-

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cal, intelligible religion, for misleading theories, and, like the apostate Galatians, "removed from him that called them into the grace of Christ unto another gospel;" if all these things had taken place, then they would indeed deserve even more censure than they have incurred; then, though we should pity their error and lament their apostasy, we should be among the last to apologize for the one, or excuse the other. It has been brought, as a charge, against the valuable ladies whose cause we are advocating, as if it were a departure from the delicacy of the sex to attend at the annual meetings of certain religious and charitable societies; but we know not what reasonable objection can be made to their being modest and silent auditors on these occasions. They do not attend the resort of the unemployed or the ill-employed—they do not attend to hear the idle news of the neighborhood, but to hear "good news from a far country," news which the angels in heaven stoop down to hear,—not the conversion of one sinner, but the conversion of many,—to hear that best news, the extension of Christianity to the extremities of the globe,—to hear that

> "All kingdoms and all princes of the earth
> Flock to that light;"—

to hear

> "That eastern Java to the farthest west,
> And Ethiopia spreads abroad the hand
> And worships!"

Compare now these inoffensive and quiet auditors with the gay multitudes of their own sex which crowd the resort of pleasure. Here, they are the peaceful listeners; there, they are the busy performers. The others are not, as here, passive recipients of entertainment, but the entertainers, but the exhibiters. Yet, who among the worldly censures one of these classes? who among the prejudiced does not censure the other?

So much for the difference in the *act;* let us examine the difference in point of *time;* for as in our pleasurable pursuits the consumption of time, that precious material of which life is made, forms a very considerable object, it cannot be thought unfair to compare the two classes on this ground.

Did the pursuits of both, in point of health, sobriety in dress, security of morals, preservation of delicacy, more nearly approach each other than the most strenuous advocate for dissipation can pretend; yet the prodigious inequality of the two as to the waste of time must settle the matter at

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once with those who know the value of this fugitive, this irretrievable talent.

Compare then the few hours in the day, and the very few days in the years, given up by the one to these serious pleasures, with the uncounted hours of the countless nights spent by the other in the *anti-social* crowds of turbulent pleasure—spent, we will not say in the *midnight* parties, for that would give a false impression of the season of those amusements. The midnight hour was heretofore used proverbially to express *late* revelling. But from the present inversion of hours, that would give an idea not only of dulness and vulgarity, but it would also rather designate the hour when company met, than when they parted. Midnight was once the time which *closed* the scene of dissipation; it is now that of *commencing* it. And it is scarcely extravagant to say, that the morning frequenters of the charitable meetings join them not many hours after the others return from the scene of their unquiet pleasures. In the one case, no neighborhood is kept awake by unseasonable noise and knockings, no servants are exposed to corruptions abroad, nor robbed of quiet rest at home.

To turn from the metropolis to the provinces. Compare the little absences from home of ladies who inspect the concerns, and give instruction to the poor, with the long and frequent desertion of another class, not of home only, but of country!

Upon the whole, though we would carefully guard against both, yet we must confess, in the present state of things, it is not so much a little excess in zeal in one quarter, as the visible growth of dissipation in another, which "has increased, is increasing, and ought to be diminished;" and truly happy should we be, if the pen of the ready writers, so frequently employed against the minor, would occasionally be exerted against the greater excess.

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The opening of the nineteenth century has been a period for the display of extraordinary energies, exerted in every sort of direction. They had been powerfully exerted in bringing on the late revolution. All the energies of France, whether in science, talent, wit, or wealth, were combined in one huge engine for the establishment of atheism on the proposed ruins of Christ and his kingdom. We hope this grand device was partly foiled, even *there*. In the general assault some skirmishes were fought in this country; but here a counter-attack was made. "Michael and his angels fought

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against the dragon and his angels, and prevailed." "The accuser of the brethren was cast down."

Afterwards the human scourge of mankind in the same foreign country, by a singular energy of character, aided by an unprecedented combination of circumstances, to which the previous contempt of religion had led the way, projected the most extraordinary enterprises, and accomplished them by the most successful perseverance in every species of political and moral mischief. In imitation of one whom the enormity of his crimes would almost warrant us in calling his grand inspirer, his labors were perhaps more energetic, because "his time was short." Here again Michael made a counter-attack on the dragon. For it is to the same powerful energies, exerted in the contrary direction, that we may ascribe those numberless noble and beneficial societies at home, which promise to effect a moral change in the condition, not of one country, not of one continent, but of the whole globe, and by which we hope finally, through the divine blessing, "to beat down Satan under our feet."

But this has not only been a period for exerting the energies of countries and communities. They have been exerted under different situations by different characters, and to opposite purposes, by individuals; they have been remarkably exhibited in private persons, in a sex where energy is less expected to break out into fearless action: in Charlotte Corday, in Madame Roland, and other political enthusiasts abroad, all acting with the spirit of the heroines of pagan Rome, and actuated by a religion much resembling theirs.

At home, the best energies of the human mind have been exerted to the best purposes, by private individuals also, and exerted without any departure from modesty, prudence, and simplicity, the sacrifice of which would ill repay the accomplishment of the most popular action.

It would be unpardonable in our remarks on well-directed energies to pass over one instance, on which, we trust, there cannot be two opinions. If some of the novelties of the present period are its errors, others are its glory. It is cheering to the wearied pilgrim, in traversing the desert of this sinful world, to have the eye here and there refreshed with a verdant spot, yielding not only beauty, but fertility.

In alluding to certain recent undertakings which reflect honor on our country, it would be unjust to omit one which reflects honor on our sex. Justice, as well as gratitude, would be wounded, were no tribute to be paid to the most heroic of women.

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The reader will have anticipated that we allude to the female Howard. Hers is almost (her sex considered) a higher strain of Christian heroism. Unprotected and alone, she dared to venture into scenes that would appal the stoutest heart, and which the single principle alone by which she was actuated could have sustained hers. With true Christian courage she ventured to explore the dreary abodes of calamity and crime, of execration and despair. She took "the gauge of misery," not as a matter of curiosity, or philosophical speculation, but with the holy hope of relieving it. The favor of him who stopped the mouths of the lions in the prophet's den, stopped those of these scarcely less savage beings. Her mild demeanor awed their rebellious spirits into peace.

Her visit was not the sudden ebullition of a charitable fit. It was the result of deliberate reflection, and doubtless of fervent prayer. She had long been projecting the means how to assist these most desperate and forlorn of human kind. She had conceived a hope, that what was flagitious might not be incorrigible; and adopted a well-digested plan for their religious instruction.

But she knew human nature too well, not to know that religious instruction would be very inefficacious, without correcting inveterately bad habits. Together with a few pious and able associates of her own sex,* she instituted a school of reform and industry, found manual employment for those who had never worked, and Christian instruction for those who had never been taught. The lips that had been seldom opened but to blaspheme their Maker were taught to praise him; the hands hitherto employed in theft were employed in honest labor. Infants, in a doubly lamentable sense, born in sin, and bred in vice, were snatched from a destruction which had appeared inevitable, and put into a train of improvement. The gloomy mansion which had lately been a scene of horror only to be exceeded by those more dreadful future mansions to which it was conducting them, changed its face. The loathsome prison which had witnessed nothing but intoxication and idleness, had heard no sounds but those of reviling and of imprecation, gradually became a scene of comparative decency, sobriety, and order.

If ever a charity of so extensive and public a nature could have been pleaded as some excuse for the remission of domestic duties, this might have been considered as the one

* Among these, Mrs. Steinkopff stands in the first rank.

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exempt case; but it was not so. If she stole some hours from her family to visit the prison, she stole some hours from sleep to attend to her family.

Happily, goodness is contagious as well as sin. We may now say in a *good* sense, "Behold how great a matter a little fire kindleth! Distant places have caught the flame. The bright example is already imitated by other ladies in some of our great towns, and will probably take a more ample range.

May we conclude this part of our subject by observing, that ladies of other religious professions would do well to copy, in certain respects, the example of the females of the society to which this distinguished lady belongs;—giving into no habits of dissipation, they have time; addicted to little expense in personal decoration, they have money; and the time and money thus snatched from vain and frivolous purposes, are more wisely directed together into the same right channel of Christian benevolence.

High Profession and Negligent Practice.

There has seldom been a period in which there was more talk of religion than that in which we live; and we are disposed to believe, that the abundance of the heart in this instance produces its usual effect upon the lips. But it must also be observed, that, in an age of much vital religion, as it must be acknowledged this is, there will naturally be not a little false profession, or, at best, in many professors, more external show than inward piety—a religion that is sometimes more distinguished by peculiar phrases, and hot contention about opinions, than by much devotedness of heart and life.

One of the causes to which the growth of crime among our poor has been assigned, is the growth of our population; and some have undertaken to prove that it is not because they are worse, but because they are more. This same way of judging may, perhaps, be applied to the apparent growth of error in religion—that it is to be ascribed to its vast increase. As there is numerically a larger population in the religious ranks, may there not be naturally expected a larger proportion of error?

We now, therefore, venture a few remarks on another class of Christians, whose intentions, we hope, are not bad, though their charity is narrow, and their information small.

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We will distinguish them by the name of Phraseologists. These are persons who, professing to believe the whole of the gospel, seem to regard only one half of it. They stand quite in opposition to the useful and laborious class whom we last considered. None will accuse these of that virtuous excess, of that unwearied endeavor to promote the good of others, on which we there animadverted. These are assiduous hearers, but indifferent doers; very valiant talkers for the truth, but remiss workers. They are more addicted to hear sermons than to profit by them.

Their religion consists more in a sort of spiritual gossiping, than in holiness of life. They diligently look out after the faults of others, but are rather lenient to their own. They accuse of being legal those who act more in the service of Christianity, and dispute less about certain opinions. They overlook essentials, and debate rather fiercely on, at best, doubtful points of doctrine; and form their judgment of the piety of others rather from their warmth in controversy, than in their walking humbly with God.

They always exhibit in their conversation the idiom of a party, and are apt to suspect the sincerity of those whose higher breeding, and more correct habits, discover a better taste. Delicacy with them is want of zeal; prudent reserve, want of earnestness; sentiments of piety, conveyed in other words than are found in their vocabulary, are suspected of error. They make no allowance for the difference of education, habits, and society: all must have one standard of language, and that standard is their own.

Even if, on some points, you hold nearly the same sentiments, it will not save your credit; if you do not express them in the same language, you are in danger of having your principles suspected. By your proficiency or declension in this dialect, and not by the greater or less devotedness of your heart, the increasing or diminishing consistency in your practice, they take the gauge of your religion, and determine the rise and fall of your spiritual thermometer. The language of these technical Christians indisposes persons of refinement, who have not had the advantage of seeing religion under a more engaging form, to serious piety, by leading them to make a most unjust association between religion and bad taste.

When they encounter a new acquaintance of their own school, these reciprocal signs of religious intelligence produce an instantaneous sisterhood; and they will run the chance of what the character of the stranger may prove to be, if she

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speaks in the vernacular tongue. With them, words are not only the signs of things, but things themselves.

If the phraseologists meet with a well-disposed young person, whose opportunities are slender, and to whom religion is new, they alarm her by the impetuosity of their questions. They do not examine if her principles are sound, but "does she pray extempore?" This alarms her, if her too recent knowledge of her Bible and herself has not yet enabled her to make this desirable proficiency. "Will she tell her experience?" These interrogations are made without regard to that humility which may make her afraid to appear better than she is, and to that modesty which restrains a loud expression of her feelings. She does not, perhaps, even know the meaning of the term, in their acceptance of it.

Do we then ridicule experimental religion? Do we think lightly of that interior power of divine grace upon the heart, which is one of the strongest evidences of the truth of Christianity? God forbid! But surely we may disapprove the treating it with flippancy and unhallowed familiarity; we may disapprove of their discussing it with as little reserve and seriousness, as if they were speaking of the state of the weather, or of the hour of the day; we may object to certain equivocal feelings being made the sole criterion of religion; feelings to which those who have them not may pretend; which those who have them may fear to communicate, before they have acquired a strength and permanency which may make them more decisive; we may blame such injudicious questions to incipient Christians, who barely know the first elements of Christianity.

By the apparent depth of their views, and this cant in the expression, the stranger is led to think there is something unintelligible in religion—some mysterious charm, which is too high for her apprehension. They will not hold out to her the consoling hope of progressive piety; for, with them, growth in grace is no grace at all,—the starting-post and the goal are one and the same point. One of these consequences probably follows: she either falls into their peculiar views, or she is driven to seek wiser counsellors, or is led, by the hopelessness of attaining to their supposed elevation, to give up the pursuit of religion altogether.

These technical religionists are so far from encouraging favorable tendencies, and "the day of small things," that they have no patience with persons professing hope, and despise every advance short of assurance.

To judge of them by their conversation, they seem to have

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as firm a certainty of their own security as of the danger of all the rest of the world; that is, of all those who do not see with *their* eyes, hear with *their* ears, and discuss in *their* language. You would suppose salvation a very easy attainment, to see them got so much above hopes or fears.

Surely eternal happiness is not so cheap a thing, as that any should plead their claim to it on slight grounds. Some who talk confidently of this certainty, do not give strong indications in their life of their having entered in at "the strait gate" which leads to it. If it cost as few sacrifices, and required as little diligence, as some exhibit, there would not be so many who need doubt of their admission. Seek, strive, run, fight, labor, know thyself, humble thyself, are imperatives not quite so easily or so generally obeyed, as to render "the narrow way" a very crowded avenue. Self-knowledge, self-denial, self-abasement, are safer symptoms than undoubting confidence and exulting security.

The desire of hearing and speaking much on religious subjects, though Christian duties, are less unequivocal marks of improvement, than whether we love money less, and our neighbor more; whether there is any abatement in our pride, any victory over our passions; whether we are more disposed to conquer our own will, and to submit to that of God. A growth in candor, in charity, in kindness and forbearance, in meekness and self-distrust, will be the probable consequence of a close examination into our present deficiency in these amiable graces.

To these persons, the exclusive credit of their individual preacher is at least as valuable a consideration as the glory of that God whom it may be *his* constant aim to glorify; and they do not think they exalt him sufficiently, if it be not done at the expense of others among his brethren, to whom he perhaps looks up with reverence. There is a wide difference between the kindness of praise and the grossness of adulation; between affection and worship; between gratitude and idolatry.

Since the human mind is so constituted as sometimes to require remission from its stricter engagements; since it feels the need of relaxing into some intervals of pleasure; it is no unimportant object to inquire what pleasures are dangerous, what are safe, and what may even be made instructive, even where improvement is not the professed object.

The persons in question have little turn for books; might it not usefully fill many a vacant gap were they to devote a little of their leisure to rational reading? There is much

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valuable literature which occupies an intermediate space between strictly religious and frothy books. History, well-chosen travels, select biographical works, furnish not only harmless, but profitable reading. The study of these would improve their views; and by expanding their minds furnish them with topics of general conversation and useful reflection. It would enlarge their charity, by letting them see that many authors are not wicked, though they do not confine their works to religious discussion.

Whatever invigorates our capacity of receiving knowledge, whatever adds new and sound ideas to our stock, is not to be despised as useless, or rejected as sinful. Be it observed, however, that general literature must not be allowed to absorb our time, nor interfere with what is of indispensable obligation; yet, if it be clear from every thing light, skeptical, or unsound, it safely fills up the otherwise idle intervals of a religious life, which without it is liable to sink into meaner recreations, and inferior pursuits.

Objects of the first importance cannot be exclusively pursued even by higher capacities than those we are now considering. It is particularly necessary, therefore, for these last to supply their leisure with occupations which will furnish useful information, and matter of pleasing communication. For if the most elevated minds require the relief of change, much more does the ordinary and uncultivated intellect. It has but few images, which are soon exhausted, and must sink into weariness if it be not replenished by new ones. Reading, such as we presume to recommend, might prevent the vacant mind from brooding over mysteries, which it has pleased the God of all wisdom, as well as all goodness, to hide from more enlightened minds than those we are contemplating. The want of something better to do, the want of resources of a higher order between the duties of the highest, reduces many persons to the most trifling ways of getting rid of time. They who allow of no intermediate reading between a sermon and a play, are often engaged in conversations, to which the most frivolous dialogues ever written would afford no adequate parallel; and they who would think it a sin to be studying the history of their country, are frequently, and perhaps eagerly, inquiring into the gossip of their own village, and contributing new anecdotes to its idle annals.

Many books are useful that are not professedly religious, for we have minds as well as souls. We may be well instructed for the purpose of this world, without invading on the more important business of another.

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If then they would adopt sober literature, in exchange for indolent trifling, their minds would improve in vigor, and their tempers in cheerfulness and candor. Every unoccupied mind lays itself open to the incursion of more dangerous enemies than those it intends to avoid; such a mind takes refuge in what is more injurious than the supposed evil, into which it congratulates itself that it has not fallen. A lively "Spectator" of Mr. Addison, or a grave "Guardian" of bishop Berkeley, would be a pleasing resource. An "Idler," or a "Rambler" of Dr. Johnson, might preserve them from realizing those characters in their own persons. Such writers would teach them the knowledge of mankind, and let them into many a snug secret which lies unmolested in their own heart. Such books might correct their taste, without deducting any thing from their stock of piety, except perhaps the phrases which disfigure it; would give them a relish for better society, and thus turn their waste moments to some profit. Be it observed, we speak of persons who have much leisure: those who have little should give that little to the one supreme object.

These religionists delight to speak of themselves as a persecuted people; so that a stranger not accustomed to their dialect, and having been in the habit of hearing the term applied to imprisonment, anathema, and proscription, is rejoiced when he afterwards finds it means no more than a little censure, and not a little ridicule; the latter perhaps more frequently drawn on them by their quaint phrases, injudicious language, and oddity of manner, than meant to express any contempt of religion itself.

We do not pretend to say, that there is not still to be encountered that lighter species of persecution which consists in reproach, suspicion, and contempt; that there is not still an inferior kind of spiritual martyrdom, which those who would live godly in Christ Jesus must be content to suffer; a persecution which touches not the life but the fame; but this affects only Christians of a higher strain than those whom we are considering; persons who do not draw on themselves censure by their indiscretion, but by their sternness in principle, and their superiority in practice. This reproach, however, they esteem a light evil, and are contented that as it was with the Master, so it must be with the servant. It is well, however, if attack makes *even them* more discreet, and reproach more humble.

In short, the religion of the phraseologists is easy, their acquisitions cheap, their sacrifices few, their stock small, but

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always ready for production. This stock is rather drawn from the memory than the mind; it consists in terms rather than ideas; in opinions rather than in principles; and is brought out on all occasions, without regard to time, place, person or circumstance.

It has been triumphantly asserted, but probably with more confidence than truth, that the children of pious persons are not, in general, piously educated. We have known too many instances to the contrary to admit the charge.

Though a good man's religion cannot be always transmitted with his estate, yet much has been done, and is actually doing, towards this transmission: and if it is sometimes found that the fact is as has been asserted, it is, we suspect, chiefly, though perhaps not exclusively, to be found in the class we have been considering. It is perhaps in consistency with some tenets they maintain, that they neglect to prepare the ground, to sow the seed, and labor to eradicate the weeds; believing that education is of little use; trusting that whatever is good must come from above, and come in God's own time. We, too, know that whatever is good must come from above; and that of whatever is good, God is the giver: but we know also, that the ripening suns, and the gracious showers, and the refreshing dews which descend from heaven, are not intended to spare the labor of cultivation, but to invigorate the plant, to fill the ear, to ripen the grain, and thus, without superseding, to reward and bless the labors of the cultivator.

Auricular Confession.

THERE are certain topics which are almost too serious to be overlooked in an undertaking of this nature, and are yet almost too delicate to be touched upon.

Though we are far from thinking auricular confession the worst part of another church, yet we do not wish to see it introduced into our own, especially under the circumstances to which we are about to allude. There are certain young ladies of good talents, and considerable cultivation, who have introduced what we might be almost tempted to call the coquetry of religion. To the friendship of men of superior reputation for abilities and piety, frequently to young men, they insinuate themselves, by making a kind of false confidence. Under the humble guise of soliciting instruction, and

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obtaining comfort, they propose to them doubts which they do not entertain, disclose difficulties which do not really distress them, ask advice which they probably do not intend to follow, and avow sensibilities with which they are not at all troubled.

This, it is to be apprehended, is a kind of pious fraud, a little stratagem to be thought better than they are, by the lowly affectation of appearing to be worse. They ask for consolation which they do not need, for they are really not unhappy; but it is gratifying to engage attention, and to excite interest. These fanciful afflictions, these speculative discontents, after having, to the sympathizing friend, appeared to be removed, are poured, with an air equally contrite, and a mind equally at ease, into the ear of the next pious and polite listener; though the penitent had gone away from the first confessor more than absolved, the mourner more than comforted.

This confidential opening of the mind, this warm pouring forth of the soul, might be perfectly right and proper, were the communication confined to *one* spiritual director. For, here the axiom is reversed; here, in the multitude of counsellors there is not safety, but danger. If the perplexity be real, if the distress sincere, why not confide it to the bosom of some experienced female friend, of some able, and *aged* divine? There all would be right and safe; there confession would bring relief, if relief and not admiration be wanted; and where the feeling of contrition is genuine, admiration will not be sought.

If the young persons in view were not really estimable, we should not have taken the liberty to guard them against this temptation to vanity and egotism. To vanity, because they go away not only with comfort, but exultation. To egotism, because they go away with an increased tendency to make self their subject.

A celebrated court* maxim-monger, who was deeply read in human nature, though he did not derive his knowledge from the best sources, nor always turn it to the best account, has however given a sound caution, from which communicative young persons might glean a lesson: "Never talk of *yourself*, neither of your good nor your bad qualities."

It is true the Christian will know the above admonition to be carried too far. He who considers that the soul is liable to diseases as well as the body, will allow the necessity for a spiritual as well as bodily physician. Now if a patient must,

* Le Duc de la Rochefoucault.

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in order to obtain relief, tell his case to a practitioner for the body, is it to be forbidden that the languishing and dejected soul should lean for advice on a moral counsellor, "an interpreter, one of a thousand?" But if the graces of the person or manner, or the hope of attracting undue attention, added nothing to the skill or worth of the adviser in one case, let us take care they do not influence our choice of the confident in the other.

The writer has been induced to hint at the abuse of this practice, from actual instances, in which unsound confidence, and a piety too artificial, by exciting kindness and awakening sympathy, have led to ill-assorted connections, formed on a misconception of the real state of mind of the confessing party.

These remarks are by no means intended to apply to that Christian communion at once so profitable and so delightful. When the intention is simple, the heart sincere, the motive pure, and the parties suitable, such intercourse cannot but be warmly recommended. The advantage is reciprocal. The doubting and distressed spirit receives the counsel and the consolation it seeks; while the pious counsellor gains a deeper knowledge of the human mind in its varieties, by the communication of the wants, the difficulties, and the sense of sin in the contrite heart. In other religious intercourse, where there is a nearer approach of character, the heart is warmed by the expansion, and improved by the interchange of pious sentiments. The prophet even annexes to it a reward: "They that feared the Lord spake often one to another; and the Lord hearkened and heard it, and a book of remembrance was written before him for them that feared the Lord, and that thought upon his name."

Unprofitable Reading.

We have already ventured to allude to the disproportionate quantity of human life which is squandered in the ever multiplying haunts of public dissipation: but as this is an evil too notorious to require any fresh animadversion, we shall not stop to insist on the excess to which it is carried, but shall advert to another, which, if less ostensible, is scarcely less mischievous—we allude to the increased and increasing prevalence of idle reading.

For whether a large proportion of our probationary being—

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time, that precious talent assigned us for providing for the treasures of eternity,—be consumed in unprofitable reading at home, or in frivolous diversions abroad, the effect on the state of the mind is not very dissimilar. The difference between private excess and public intoxication is not very material as to its effects on the individual; the chief difference lies in the example and the expenses; for the mind is nearly as much unfitted for sober duties by the one, as by the other.

It is the same principle which influences the inveterate novel reader, and the never-wearied pursuer of public dissipation; only its operation is different in different tempers. The active and lively trifler seeks to lose reflection in the bustling crowd; while the more indolent alienates her mind from what is right, without any exertion of the body. In one it is the imagination which is acted upon; in the other, the senses. In one sense, indeed, the domestic idleness is the worst; because it wraps itself up in its own comparative merit, and complacently reposes on its superior sobriety; for, if the spirits are more agitated in the one case, in the other they sink into a more perilous indolence. The scenes acted over by the imagination in private, have also a superiority in mischief over those of actual, busy gayety in others, as being more likely to be retained and repeated. Instances, however, are not rare, in which a thorough manager contrives to make both meet. In this union the injury is doubled.

But it will be urged by the too ready advocates, that *all* these books are not wicked. It is readily granted. Many works of fiction may be read with safety, some even with profit; but the constant familiarity even with such as are not exceptionable in themselves, relaxes the mind that wants hardening, dissolves the heart which wants fortifying, stirs the imagination which wants quieting, irritates the passions which want calming, and, above all, disinclines and disqualifies for active virtues, and for spiritual exercises. The habitual indulgence in such reading is a silent, mining mischief. Though there is no act, and no moment, in which any open assault on the mind is made, as in the instances previously noticed, yet the constant habit performs the work of a mental atrophy; it produces all the symptoms of decay, and the danger is not less for being more gradual, and, therefore, less suspected.

The general manners are becoming more and more relaxed. Even the old restraints, which had a regard to appearances, were not without their use. The writer remembers to have heard Dr. Johnson reprove a young lady in severe terms for

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quoting a sentiment from Tom Jones—a book, he said, which, if a modest lady had done so improper a thing as to read, she should not do so immodest a thing as to avow.

Many instances might be adduced to prove, that the age is gradually grown less scrupulous. We will give only one. Another young lady, independent and rich, about the same time was tempted to send for Rosseau's Heloise. A very little progress in the work convinced her, that it was neither safe for her to read, nor, having read it, could she either modestly confess it, or conscientiously deny the perusal, if questioned. Her virtue conquered her curiosity; she sent away, unread, a book which may now be seen lying open on the tables of many who would be shocked at the slightest imputation on the delicacy of their minds, or the scrupulousness of their morals.

But to limit the evil of idle reading to the single article of *time:* it is, perhaps, not too much to assert, that if the hours spent by the higher and middle classes in this profitless perusal could be counted, they would, probably, far exceed in number those spent by the gay in more ostensible and public dissipation. Nay; we are almost tempted to say, that if, to the account of time dissipated by the latter, were added the hours spent by both classes in acts of devotion and serious reading, perhaps the total aggregate would be exceeded in number by the hours thrown away in the retirement of idle readers.

We are the more earnest on this subject, from being in possession of some facts which evince beyond any persuasions, which confirm beyond any arguments, the perils which we may be thought too warm in deprecating. Among the overflowing number of fictitious writings, not a few are there in the English, and still more and worse in the French and German schools, in which the intrigue between the already married hero and heroine is opened by means so apparently innocent, and conducted so gradually, and with so much plausibility, as, for a time, to escape detection. Vicious scenes are artfully kept out of sight, while virtuous principles are silently, but systematically undermined, till the imagination, that notorious corrupter of the heart, has had time to prepare the work of destruction. Such fascinating qualities are lavished on the seducer, and such attractive graces on the seduced, that the images indulged with delight by the fancy carry on the reader imperceptibly to a point which is not so far from their indulgence in the act as some imagine. Such soothing apologies for an amiable weakness, that is, in

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plain English, for the breach of the seventh commandment, are made by the writer, that the reader begins to think her judgment is convinced, as well as her inclination gratified; and the polluted mind, brought into the state, of all others, the least willing, and the least able, to resist practical crime, is ready to exclaim, with the satirist of political vices,

That *not* to be corrupt is the shame.

Thus the violation of as awful a prohibition as any in the decalogue is softened down into a pardonable weakness. The stabbing the peace and honor of the husband, and the barbarous desertion of the innocent babes, or the still deeper wound given to the grown up daughters, is reduced to a venial fault, for which the irresistibleness of the temptation is shamelessly, but too successfully pleaded.

In tracing the effect, almost exclusively, of the unrestrained indulgence in these soothing pictures of varnished corruption, we could, were it prudent, produce actual instances of this breach of solemn vows, this total abandonment of all the proprieties, and all the duties of life: and it is too probable, that, besides the known instances to which allusion is here made, others might be adduced as having imbibed from the same sources the rudiments of moral misery, which has alarmingly swelled the recent list of divorces, and thus render it more than probable, that the circulating library is no unfrequent road to Doctors' Commons.

There are distinctions and gradations maintained by the squanderers of time in their several ways, of which the well-employed do not perceive the difference. Many who would turn with contempt from the card-table, think little of giving days and nights to these pernicious, or, at best, unimproving fictions—an exchange without being an improvement; for the volumes do not, like the cards, confine the mischief to the time they are in the hands, but, as we have observed, often leave impressions behind them when the others are forgotten.

How gladly should we limit these observations to persons whose time is turned to little account, and spent with little scruple, in *any* amusement which is not obviously corrupt! But it is with real reluctance we take the liberty to animadvert on the same error, though not carried to the same excess, in persons of a higher strain of character, persons of correct manners and considerable attainments. Do not many such tolerate in their families abundance of reading, which, to say the least, is not improving, and of which, frequently, this would be too gentle a censure? Even where the books

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contain little that is coarse or corrupt, still it must be repeated, the prodigious quantity of life they consume must exceedingly deduct from that which would otherwise be allotted to more wholesome studies.

And this is not all. We hear passages, not the most pure in point of delicacy, and quite unequivocal in point of impiety, repeated with enthusiasm by young ladies, from the works of a noble, but profligate and infidel poet: a poet rich in abused genius, and abounding in talents, ungratefully employed to dishonor Him who gave them. But from the same fair lips we hear little of Milton and of Spencer, of Cowper and of Young, of Thomson and of Goldsmith, of Gray and of Beattie, names once dear to every lover of enchanting song. Nor need we look back exclusively to departed genius for the innocent and refreshing delights of poetry. The muses have living votaries, who pour forth strains at once original, mellifluous, and chaste.

What shall we presume to say to sober-minded parents, even to grave clergymen, who not only do not prohibit the authors of the school in question; who not only do not restrain their daughters from being students in it, but who not unfrequently introduce, as part of the family reading, poetry, which, if it contain not the gross expressions, and vulgar wickedness of the wits of Charles' days, is little less profane in principle, or corrupt in sentiment? There is some knowledge which it is a praise not to know; and the vice in this case being somewhat "refined through certain strainers," furnishes at once a temptation and an apology.

It may be urged, in vindication of this remissness, that as soon as young persons get out of their parents' hands, they will naturally choose their books for themselves. This is granted. But is not every year which prolongs their precious innocence a year gained? May not, within that period, the nascent libertinism be checked, the ardent imagination fixed to other pursuits, the sentiment of virtue kindled, the taste for purity confirmed, and the habit and love of prayer established? And, above all, is it not a pity that they should be able hereafter to plead as an apology for their intimacy with such books, that they were introduced to them by a fond and careful parent?

May we not take the liberty to ask of worthy, but, in this instance, injudicious parents, is this practice quite consistent with the command given to fathers, even under a darker dispensation, that they should not limit the improvement of their children to any set hours, but that they should "teach them

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diligently, sitting in the house, and walking by the way, rising up, and lying down?"

The Borderers.

Religion and the world used formerly to be considered as two different regions, situated separate and apart from each other. They seldom maintained much unnecessary intercourse. One party shuddered at the strictness and severity of the other; which, in its turn, kept aloof from a communication which it feared might contaminate its own purity.

Between them lay a kind of neutral ground, which, though it divided them, was, however, occasionally passed during any short interval of peace, for offices of necessity, of business, or of kindness; offices which, nevertheless, produced at no time entire reconciliation.

This neutral territory has been lately seized upon and occupied by a third party, a civil, obliging, and accommodating people, who are so perfectly well-bred as to be desirous of keeping well with their neighbors on both sides of the boundary. They are invited to intimacy by the gratifications held out by the one, and the reputation conferred by the other; present indulgence tempts on the left, future hope on the right. The present good, however, is generally too powerful a competitor for the future. They not only struggle to maintain their own interest in both countries, but are kindly desirous of accommodating all differences between the belligerent powers. Their situation, as borderers, gives them great local advantages on both sides. Though they keep on the same good terms with both, they have the useful and engaging talent of seeming to belong exclusively to that party in which they happen to find themselves.

Their chief difficulty arises when they happen to meet the inhabitants of both territories together; yet so ingenious are they in the art of trimming, that they contrive not to lose much ground with either.

When alone with one party, they take care never to speak warmly of the absent. With the worldly they smile, and perhaps good-naturedly shake their head at some little scruples, and some excess of strictness in the absent party, though they do not go the length of actual censure.

When with the religious colony they tenderly lament the necessity imposed on them of being obliged to associate so

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much with neighbors from whom, they confess, there is not much to be learned, while they own there is something to be feared; but, as they *are quite sure* their inclination is not of the party, they trust there is no great danger. They regret, that as they *must* live on terms with the world, they cannot, without a singularity to which ridicule would attach, avoid adopting some of their manners and customs. Thus they think it prudent to indulge in the same habits of luxury and expense; to conform to many of the same practices, doubtful at the best; and to attend on some places of diversion, for which, indeed, they profess to feel no great relish, and which, for the sake of propriety, are rather submitted to than enjoyed! "One would not be particular, one does no good by singularity."

By an invariable discretion, they thus gain the confidence and regard of both parties. The old settlers on the fashionable side are afraid of losing them, by opposition to their occasionally joining their enemies; while the religious colonies are desirous of retaining them, and rendering them service by courtesy and kindness, still charitably hoping their intentions are right, and their compliances reluctant. Thus their borders are every day extending, and their population increasing. As they can speak, as occasion requires, the language of both countries, they have the advantage of appearing to be always at home with each, who never suspect that the same facility in the dialect of the other equally secures their popularity there.

In one respect, they carefully comply with the apostle's injunction, applying to it, however, a meaning of their own, "They let their moderation be known unto all men." They scrupulously avoid extremes. They keep a kind of debtor and creditor account with religion and the world, punctually paying themselves for some practice they renounce, by adopting some other which is a shade or two lighter: between these shades they discriminate nicely; and the pride they feel in what they have given up is more sincere than the gratification at what they retain.

Thus, though hovering on the borders of both countries, they do not penetrate into the depths of either. The latitude they happen to be cast in varies according to circumstances. An awakening sermon will drive them, for a time, beyond the usual geographical degree; an amusing novel, or a new canto of Childe Harold, will seduce them to retreat. Their intentions however, they flatter themselves, are generally on the right side, while their movements are too frequently on the other.

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But though their language can accommodate itself to both parties, their personal appearance is entirely under the direction of one of them. In their external decorations, they are not behind the foremost of their fashionable friends; and truth obliges us reluctantly to confess, that their dress is as little confined within the bounds of strict delicacy, as that of women the rest of whose conduct is more exceptionable. The consequence is not unnatural; for to those who must *do* like other people, it is also necessary to *look* like other people. It does, however, seem a little incongruous, to hear the language of one of the countries spoken, even with a strong accent, by ladies in the full costume of the other.

These borderers are frequently disposed to be benevolent, partly from a warm temperament, partly from a conviction that charity is a duty. They profess to give whatever they can spare, but of that proportion they allow vanity, and not piety, to be the arbiter. If personal ornament, if habits of luxury did not swallow up their money, charity would have it. Charity is the next best thing to self-gratification.

Should they continue their present course, and their numbers increase, or, as is commonly the case, should continual motion accelerate progress, the landmarks of separation between the several countries will insensibly be lost, and it will be difficult to define the exact limitations of the invading neighbors.

It has frequently been regretted that an amicable accommodation between the adverse parties could not be accomplished by the interference of this intermediate region. But whenever it has been attempted, it has not always been successful. The coalition, it has been found, could not readily be brought about. Prejudices on the one part, and rigorous demands on the other, have hitherto perpetuated the separation

Terms of peace, indeed, cannot easily be made where one side expects so many sacrifices, and where the other has so much that must be parted with. The worldly territory having, beyond all comparison, the larger population, is of course the stronger, and therefore most likely to hold out.

But though no actual flag of truce has yet been sent out for a general peace, yet alliances are frequently contracted between individuals of the hostile countries, but on very unequal terms; for it unfortunately happens that the party from the more correct side, "who come out to visit the daughters of the land," have been seduced by the cheerful music, splendid banners, and gay attractions of the other; and have been prevailed upon to settle in the enemy's camp. To them it

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more frequently happens that they gradually forget all they learnt in their father's house, and insensibly adopt the manners of the strange country, than that they bring over the other party to their side. It may, therefore, perhaps be safer not to contract these *unholy alliances* till there is a conquest obtained by the small territory over the great one; an event which, if we may judge by the present state of the parties, seems at a very considerable distance.

But enough, and perhaps the scrupulous Christian will say too much, of this light manner of treating a serious subject. We acknowledge the charge; we bow to the correction; confessing that we scarcely knew how to approach this important and interesting class of persons without the thin veil of something between fiction and fact, between allegory and true history. We felt an almost sinful reluctance to say any thing which might seem revolting to those pleasing characters who have shown some disposition to religion, who love its disciples, without having courage to imitate them. But real concern for their best interests will not allow those who assume to advocate the cause of Christianity, to conceal the distance at which they at present appear to stand from its constraining power, and from its practical consequences.

Perhaps your creed is not very erroneous. Probably the rectitude of your religious friends, whose doctrines are sound, and the indifference of your fashionable friends, who "care for none of these things," have preserved you pretty clear from errors of opinion. Whilst the occasional society of the pious has kept your sentiments in order, the amusements of the worldly have indemnified you for the severities of the other quarter. But opinions do little till they are ripened into principles. It is reputable to say with one party, "strait is the gate and narrow is the way;" but the company of the other lets you see that it is not so easy to enter in at that gate, and to walk in that way, as you had flattered yourself you should have found it.

To you the *world* is by far the most formidable foe of the triple alliance, of the three confederate enemies, which the Scripture tells us war against the soul. We have presumed that your opinions may not be very erroneous, but there are moral as well as speculative heresies, of which worldliness is the originating principle, and in which it is the practical operator. The WORLD is the grand heresiarch. There are many more who "love the world, and the things of the world," than who care whether doctrines are true or false. While they themselves are let alone to follow their own devices;

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while they are left undisturbed to their own pursuits; you may propound, or controvert, or adopt any opinion, sound or heretical, with equally little danger, or equally little benefit to them.

To the devotee of pleasure there is something harsh and repulsive in doctrines and dogmas; to take part with them would be going out of the way: while to those who can contrive to make right opinions live on friendly terms with wrong practices, it would be a gratuitous folly to add to the faults of conduct the errors of speculation.

In this affectionate remonstrance, we allude not to what might be called palpable and tangible offences; these the decorums of their condition set them above any temptation to commit. We speak not of any disbelief or contempt of religion; these are not the immediate perils of their position: it is not infidelity but indifference—a disinclination to Christianity, not as opposed to unbelief, but as it contradicts the maxims, the manners, the habits of their associates. Their danger consists in a supreme attachment to present objects, and a neglect of such as are future; it consists in preferring the pleasures and the interests of the world to the service of him who made it. They are governed by other principles than those of that gospel which has proclaimed that "the friendship of the world is enmity against God." They are influenced by its opinions, misled by its example, enslaved by its amusements; they fear lest any deviation from its prescribed code should bring their good sense and good taste in question; lest withdrawing from its practices should bring on them the imputation of narrowness or enthusiasm. In short, they go with "the multitude that keep holyday," not, indeed, in the scriptural sense, but in direct conformity to the vulgar acceptation of that term.

Worldly allurements find in the unrenewed heart a willingness to meet them, a disposition accommodated to them by temperament, a readiness to pursue them, increased by habit. The natural heart is already on the world's side. Before the world has time to begin its attack, the citadel is disposed to yield. Before the assault is made, there is a mutual good understanding, a silent connivance between the besiegers and the besieged. As soon as the trenches are opened, the disposition to parley and to submit is nearly the same act.

You appeared, however, to take the first step in what is right, by occasionally joining religious society, and by the pleasure you expressed in it. By that introduction you seemed not undesirous of ranging yourself partly on that

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side. Having broken through that first obstruction, it was hoped that every subsequent step would have become less irksome.

That religion has its difficulties we do not pretend to deny; but, with a hearty concurrence of the will, nurtured by cordial prayer, strengthened by a full reliance on the Savior, and sustained by the aid of his Spirit, which is offered you, the difficulties will daily diminish. Rest not, then, in that low state of religion which is satisfied with the hope of escaping punishment; calculate not how small a measure may suffice to effect that escape. Search not out for an imaginary intermediate state between the children of wrath and the children of God. Rest not till you have attained that entire consecration of heart, whose object, aim, and end, is eternal life. Forget not that they who run in a race, though they may come closer to the goal, yet, if they come short of it, fail of the prize as completely as those competitors whose distance is greater; and, if we come short of heaven, whether we lose it by more or fewer steps, the failure is equally decisive, the loss equally irreparable.

Those worldly persons with whom you associate are intrenched on every side by numbers; they therefore act as if they thought that the evil, supposing it to be evil, which is shared among so many, cannot be injurious to the individual; forgetting that every man must bear his own burden, and suffer for his own sin; for, though multitudes may give countenance to your errors here, they will not answer for you hereafter.

Do not follow those who have no settled course of their own—who are hurried to and fro by every breath of custom, whom fashion leadeth whithersoever it listeth. The persons against whom we would guard you, though confident, are not without their fears; but it is worth observing, that their fears seldom lie on the same side with their dangers. They fear not great practical errors; these they soften down and treat with complacency; these are tenderly mentioned as the infirmities of nature—weaknesses to which we are all liable. Almost every excess in personal gratification is thus kindly palliated: "Why did God give us both the disposition and the means to indulge it, if indulgence were a sin?" There is but one excess they guard against—an excess, indeed, of which they are in little danger,—we mean a high degree of religion; for surely excess is little to be feared where the thing has not yet even been entered upon!

Be assured, that whatever serves to keep the heart from

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God, is one and the same spirit of irreligion, whether it appear in the shape of coarse vice, or whether it is softened by the smoothness of decorum, and the blandishments of polished life. We are far from comparing them together, as if they were equally injurious to society, or equally offensive to decency; but we *must* compare them together as equally drawing away the heart from the worship and the love of God. Courteousness, which is unaccompanied by principle, will stand the most courteous in no stead, with him who is a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart.

Some of these well-bred persons, who exercise this large and liberal candor towards practical offences, and treat with tenderness certain vices not thought disreputable by the world, and who even put a favorable construction on things very unjustifiable in the sight of God, lose all their kindness, put no favorable interpretation, when sound religion is in question. They are, indeed, too discreet to reprobate it under its own proper name, but the ready appellation of enthusiasm presents itself—is always at hand to vindicate the hastiest judgment, and the most contemptuous construction.

But though we think far better things of you, whom we are addressing, yet may you not, in this society, be tempted to disavow, or, at least, to conceal, even the measure of piety you actually have, for fear of exciting that dreaded suspicion of "being righteous overmuch?" May not this fear, strengthened by this society, keep you back till your pious tendencies, by being suppressed, may gradually come to be extinguished?

We are ready to acknowledge, and to love, all that is amiable in you: but we must not forget, that the fairest and most brilliant creature, the most engaging manners, and the most accomplished mind, stands in the same need of repentance, forsaking of sin, redemption by the Son of God, and renovation by his Spirit, as the least attractive. The more engaging the manners, and the more interesting the acquirements, the more it is to be lamented, that these very attractions, by your complacency in them, may have stood between you and heaven,—may, by your resting in them, have been the cause of your not pressing towards the mark for the prize of your high calling of God in Christ Jesus.

Bear then in mind, that you may be pleasing to others while you have an unsanctified heart; that politeness, though it may put on the appearance of humility, is but a poor imitation of that prime grace; that good-breeding, though the beautiful decoration of a pious mind is but a wretched substitute for the want of it.

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Be assured, however, at the same time, that true religion will in no wise diminish your natural or acquired graces; so far from it, those graces will be more estimable; they will be even more admired, when they are known not to be the best things you have. When you set less value on them yourself, they will be more pleasing to others; who, though they will not estimate them above their worth, will not depreciate them below it.

We are persuaded that you are too reasonable to expect that Christianity will change its character, or lower its requirements, or make the strait gate wider, or the narrow way broader, or hold out false colors, in order to induce you to embrace it. It is not that easy and superficial thing which some suppose, as requiring little more than a ceremonious attendance on its forms, and a freedom from the gross violation of its commands. This may be nominal, but it is not saving Christianity. It is not that spiritual, yet practical religion, for which the Son of God endured the cross, that he might establish it in the hearts of his followers, which he is pleading with his heavenly Father to establish in your heart. He did not suffer that his children might be excused from self-denial; nor that, because he was holy, they might be negligent. He suffered, that "the women that are at ease might rise up; that the careless daughters might hear his voice, and give ear unto his word."

If you are disposed to think that what you must give up is great, compare it with what you will gain, and you will be ashamed of your miscalculation; you will think the sacrifice as small as the objects sacrificed were worthless; for Christianity, though a self-denying principle, yet denies you nothing which, even now, adds to your real happiness. It only disenchants you from an illusion, and gives you substantial peace in exchange. It will rob you of nothing which good sense and sound reason do not condemn, as well as the New Testament.

Perhaps you have just religion enough to render you occasionally uneasy. The struggle between the claims of the world and your casual convictions is far from being a happy state. The flattery which delights misleads; the diversions which amuse will not console; the prospect which promises disappoints. Continue not, then, "working in the fire for very vanity." Labor not to reconcile two interests, which, spite of your endeavors, will ever remain irreconcilable.

A life governed by Christianity differs in every thing from the worldly system. It is free from the turbulence and the

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agitation of its pursuits; it has none of the anxieties and jealousies of its competitions; consequently none of the lassitude and the vexation of its disappointing results. The further you proceed in its paths of pleasantness, the pleasanter they become. Its difficulties diminish, its delights increase. It has pleasures of its own, higher and better; satisfactions which depend not on human admiration, but on his favor, whom to know is eternal life.

Continue not, then, to live as if the great end for which you were sent into the world was already accomplished. Continue not to act as if you thought you had done all for which God gave you an intelligent mind, reasoning faculties, aspiring thoughts, capacities for endless happiness. Let not those powers which were meant to fit you not only for the society of angels, but for the vision of God, be any longer wasted on objects the most frivolous; on things which, at best, must end when the world ends. Oh! renounce pursuits, some of them below a rational, unsuited to an accountable, and altogether unworthy of a never-ending being! Renounce them for objects more becoming a candidate for an inheritance among the saints in light, better adapted to an immaterial, immortal spirit, and commensurate with eternity.

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REFLECTIONS ON PRAYER,

AND ON THE ERRORS WHICH MAY PREVENT ITS EEFICACY.

On the Corruption of Human Nature.

The most original French writer of our own time, but who employed his powerful talents to the most pernicious purposes, abruptly begins his once popular work on education with this undeniable truth—"All is good as it comes out of the hands of God, all is corrupted in the hands of man."

In his first position, this sceptic bears a just testimony to the goodness of his Creator: but the second clause, his subsequent application of it, though also a truth, is not the whole truth. He ascribes all the evils of man to the errors of his education.

Now, though it cannot be denied that many of his faults are owing to a defect in education, yet his prime evil lies deeper, is radical, and must be traced to a more remote and definite cause.

Had the writer been as enlightened as he was ingenious, he would have seen that the principle of evil was antecedent to his education; that it is to be found in the inborn corruption of the human heart. If, then, from an infidel, we are willing to borrow an avowal of the goodness of God in the creation of man, we must look to higher authorities to account for his degeneracy, even to the sacred oracles of God himself.

The subject of man's apostasy is so nearly connected with the subject of prayer, being indeed that which constitutes the necessity of this duty, that some mention of the one ought to precede any discussion of the other. Let then the conviction that we are fallen from our original state, and that this lapse furnishes the most powerful incentive to prayer,

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furnish an apology for making a few preliminary remarks on this doctrine.

The doctrine is not the less a fundamental doctrine, because it has been abused to the worst purposes; some have considered it as leaving us without hope, and others as lending an excuse to unresisted sin. It is a doctrine which meets us in one unbroken series throughout the whole sacred volume; we find it from the third of Genesis, which records the event of man's apostasy, carried on through the history of its fatal consequences in all the subsequent instances of sin, individual and national, and running in one continued stream from the first sad tale of woe, to the close of the sacred canon in the apocalyptic vision.

And, to remove the groundless hope that this quality of inherent corruption belonged only to the profligate and abandoned, the divine Inspirer of the sacred writers took especial care that they should not confine themselves to relate the sins of these alone.

Why are the errors, the weaknesses, and even the crimes of the best men recorded with equal fidelity? Why are we told of the twice repeated deceit of the father of the faithful? Why of the single instance of vanity in Hezekiah? Why of the too impetuous zeal of Elijah? Why of the error of the almost perfect Moses? Why of the insincerity of Jacob? Why of the far darker crimes of the otherwise holy David? Why of the departure of the wisest of men from that piety, displayed with sublimity unparalleled in the dedication of the temple? Why seems it to have been invariably studied to record with more minute detail the vices and errors of these eminent men, than even those of the successive impious kings of Israel and of Judah; while these last are generally dismissed with the brief but melancholy sentence, that they did that which was evil in the sight of the Lord; followed only by too frequent an intimation that they made way for a successor worse than themselves? The answer is, that the truth of our universal lapse could only be proved by transmitting the record of those vices from which even the holiest men were not exempt.

And as these affecting details unanswerably establish the truth of the doctrine, so they are not recorded for barren doctrinal information. They are recorded to furnish Christians of every age with salutary caution, with awful warning.

Surely the best man among us will hardly venture to say that he is more holy than Abraham, Moses, David or Peter. If, then, these saints exhibited such evidences of not having

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escaped the universal infection, will not every reflecting child of mortality yield to the conviction, that this doctrine is as true as the history which has recorded it? Will he not proceed further to say, "How then shall I be high-minded? How shall I not fear? How shall I deny the cause of the evil tendencies of my own heart, the sins of my own life, the thoughts of foolishness, and the actings of iniquity within myself?" And will not such serious inquiry, by God's grace, acting on the study of the characters of these highly eminent, but not perfect worthies of old times, patriarchs, prophets, and saints, lead the inquirer, through the redemption wrought for all, and faith in the operation of the blessed Spirit, to that effectual repentance and fervent prayer, to which, in this same divine history, such gracious promises are made?

Had the Holy Scriptures kept back from man the faithful delineations of the illustrious characters to which we have referred, the truth of the doctrine in question, though occasionally felt, and, in spite of his resistance, forced upon him, would not have been believed; or if believed, would not have been acknowledged.

It is, then, one great end of the oracles of divine truth, to humble man, under a sense of his inherent and actual corruptions. The natural man feels it repugnant to his pride to suppose this doctrine is addressed to him.

It is very true that this all-important doctrine of human corruption is, like many other truths, both in the natural, moral, and spiritual world, liable to certain speculative objections and metaphysical difficulties. Laying hold on these, which, often, a child might discover, and no philosopher be able to answer, even upon merely philosophical subjects, we excuse ourselves altogether from studying the divine book, and fearful, in secret, of the discoveries we should make, pretend that its Author has left truth so obscure, as to be impervious to human eyes; or so lofty, as to be above human reach.

But is it not making God unjust, and even the author of that sin which he charges on ourselves, to suppose that he had put truth and knowledge out of our reach, and then threatened to punish us for failing in that which he himself had made impossible? Is it probable that he, whose eyes you say are so pure that he cannot look upon iniquity, should tolerate it, by tying our hands and blinding our eyes, and thus abandon us to the unrestrained dominion of that which he hates?

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The only real question which concerns us in our present imperfect and probationary state, is this: Are the statements of revelation sufficient to establish this or that doctrine? And is the doctrine so established a sufficient ground for the duties required? If this be answered in the affirmative, then to ask for fewer difficulties, clearer light, or stronger motives to action, is only to enter a vain contest with almighty wisdom and divine supremacy. Our present disobedience proves that more light would only increase our guilt, stronger motives would only render us more inexcusable. We should reject then what we neglect now. To refuse what we now have, is not for want of light, but of eyes; not for want of motives, but of faith; not for want of rules, but of obedience; not for want of knowledge, but of will. Let us then pity those blind eyes which do not see, and especially those wilful eyes which will not see.

The Christian revelation, as far as respects its professed practical purpose, is brought within the reach of the plainest understanding. We speak of the gospel itself, and not of those metaphysical perplexities with which the schools have endeavored to meet metaphysical objections; we speak of the fundamental truths on which God has made salvation to depend. The unlettered Christian lays hold on those truths which the philosopher misses. The former looks to the Holy Spirit for his teacher, the latter to his own understanding. The one lives holily, and thus, "by doing the will of God, he comes to know of the doctrine whether it be of God."

Christianity hangs on a few plain truths; "that God is, and that he is the rewarder of all that seek him;" that man has apostatized from his original character, and by it has forfeited his original destination; that Christ came into this world and died upon the cross to expiate sin, and to save sinners; that after his ascension into heaven, he did not leave his work imperfect. He sent his Holy Spirit, who performed his first office by giving to the apostles miraculous powers. His offices did not cease there; he has indeed withdrawn his miraculous gifts, but he still continues his silent but powerful operations, and that in their due order: first, that of convincing of sin, and of changing the heart of the sinner, before he assumes the gracious character of the Comforter. What need, then, of heresies to perplex doctrines, or of philosophy to entangle, or of will-worshippers to multiply them?

We do not deny that there are, in Christianity, high and

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holy mysteries; but these "secret things," though they "be long to God," have their practical uses for us; they teach us humility, the prime Christian grace; and they exercise faith, the parent attribute of all other graces.

This religion of facts, then, the poorest listeners in the aisles of our churches understand sufficiently to be made by it wise unto salvation. They are saved by a practical belief of a few simple, but inestimable truths.

By these same simple truths, martyrs and confessors, our persecuted saints, and our blessed reformers, were saved. By these few simple truths, Locke, and Boyle, and Newton, were saved; not because they saw their religion through the glass of their philosophy, but because theirs was not "a philosophy, falsely so called," nor their science a "science of opposition;" but a science and a philosophy which were made subservient to Christianity, and because their deep humility sanctified their astonishing powers of mind. These wonderful men, at whose feet the learned world is still satisfied to sit, sat themselves at the feet of Jesus. Had there been any other way but the cross by which sinners could be saved, they, perhaps, of all men, were best qualified to have found it.

The wise and the weak, the illiterate and the learned, cannot, indeed, equally discuss or expound these doctrines, but they are equally saved by them. In view of the simple means of salvation, talents lose their superiority, learning its dignity, and power its pre-eminence. While the sober Christian keeps on his safe, because prescribed course, the wise, and the disputer of this world, by deserting it fall into absurdities which plain men escape; they make the difficulties they do not find, and wander in the endless mazes of presumptuous deviation.

To return, then, to the particular doctrines under consideration:—Let us believe man is corrupt, because the Bible tells us he is so. Let us believe that such were so by nature, even the best, since we learn it from the divine source. Let us, from the same authority, trace the disorder to its source from a fallen parent, its seat in a corrupted heart, its extent through the whole man, its universality over the whole race.

All are willing to allow that we are subject to frailties, to imperfections, to infirmities; facts compel us to confess a propensity to crimes, but worldly men confine the commission of them to the vulgar. But to rest here would lead us to a very false estimate of the doctrine in question, contrary to the decisive language of Scripture; it would establish cor-

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ruption to be an accident, and not a root. It would, by a division of offenders into two classes, deny that all offences are derived from one common principle.

Among the higher ranks there is little temptation to the commission of certain sins; murder is rare, fraud uncommon, robbery not found, yet the inborn principle is the same in all. Circumstances, rank, education, example, reputation, give advantages to one class, which, had they changed places, might have led to the vices so common in the other; while, had the notorious offenders against the laws and the divine Lawgiver changed situations with their superiors, we should then have heard only of *their* imperfections, *their* infirmities, *their* frailties.

Temptation does not make the sin, it lies ready in the heart. Accident does not create the propensity, it only brings it into action. It destroys the plea of exemption from natural corruption, but it does not put that corruption *into* the heart. It was there before, ready, without the grace of God, ready, without the restraint of religion, ready, without the bridle of an enlightened conscience, to break out into any excess. Yet there are many flagrant offences against God and against human laws, which the high-born and the high-bred frequently commit with as little scruple as the lowest. The frequency of duelling, the breach of the seventh commandment, two offences frequently found in the same company, gaming, the violation of the Sabbath, with other enormities, would alone sufficiently prove the principle to exist, independently of rank, education, or fortune. Are not what, by way of distinction, we may call the metaphysical or spiritual sins, which are cherished without loss of character—is not ambition, which knows no bounds—envy, which knows no rest—avarice, which destroys all feeling—jealousy, which is its own tormentor—ill-temper, which is the tormentor of others—ungoverned anger, which is murder in its first seeds;—are not all these equally to be found in the high-born and the low-bred? Again, is not sensuality in the great, which, in the case of the poor, might have produced unfair means to indulge it—is not the love of splendor and ostentation, which are thought to add dignity to the rich, the very principle which leads the necessitous to forgery, the crime for which so many are now suffering capital punishment?

If, then, men would examine their own bosoms as closely as they censure the faults of others loudly, we should all find there the incipient stirrings of many a sin, which, when brought into action by the temptations of poverty, of igno-

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rance, of unrestrained passion, produce consequences the most appalling. Let us then bless God, not that we are better than other men, but that we are placed by Providence out of the reach of being goaded by that temptation, stimulated by that poverty, which, had they been our lot, might have led to the same termination.

Let then the fear of God, the knowledge of his word, and the knowledge of ourselves, teach us that there is not, by nature, so wide a difference between ourselves and the men we abhor, as we fondly fancy; that there is not, by nature, a great gulf fixed, that they who are on this side might not have passed over to the other. Let us not look to any superior virtue, to any native strength of our own, but let us look with a lively gratitude to that mercy of God which has preserved us from such temptations; to his unmerited goodness, which has placed us in circumstances that have put us above necessity—"the devil's plea." But, above all, let us look to that preventing and restraining grace which is withheld from none who ask it, and we shall not be so very forward to say, contemptuously, to the worst of our fellow-creatures, "stand by, I am holier than thou." A thorough belief in this doctrine would lead us to pray more fervently to be delivered in "all time of our wealth, as in all time of our tribulation."

It is not enough that God has *revealed* the way of salvation, he must also incline us to *accept* it. It is this gift, and this acceptance, which makes the distinction between the best men and the worst. Without this all-powerful grace, Latimer might have led Bonner to the stake; with it, Bonner might have ascended the scaffold a martyr to true religion. Without this grace, Luther might have fattened on the sale of indulgences; and with it, Leo the Tenth might have accomplished the blessed work of the Reformation.

False Notions of the Dignity of Man, shown from his Helplessness and Dependence.

Man is not only a sinful, he is also a helpless, and therefore a dependent being. This offers new and powerful motives for the necessity of prayer, the necessity of looking continually to a higher power, to a better strength than our own. If that power sustain us not, we fall; if he direct us not, we wander. His guidance is not only perfect freedom

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but perfect safety. Our greatest danger begins from the moment we imagine we are able to go alone.

The self sufficiency of a man, arising from his imaginary dignity, is a favorite doctrine with the nominal Christian. He feeds his pride with this pernicious aliment. The contrary opinion is so closely connected, indeed is so intimately blended, with the subject of the preceding chapter, that we shall have the less occasion to extend our present observations to any length.

We hear much, and we hear falsely, of the dignity of human nature. Prayer, founded on the true principles of Scripture, alone teaches us wherein our true dignity consists. The dignity of a fallen creature is a perfect anomaly. True dignity, contrary to the common opinion, that it is an inherent excellence, is actually a sense of the want of it; it consists not in our valuing ourselves, but in a continual feeling of our dependence upon God, and an unceasing aim at conformity to his image.

Nothing but a humbling sense of the sinfulness of our nature, of our practised offences, of our utter helplessness and constant dependence, can bring us to fervent and persevering prayer. How did the faith of the saints of old flourish under a darker dispensation, through all the clouds and ignorance which obscured their views of God? "They looked unto him and were enlightened!" How do their slender means and high attainments reproach us!

David found that the strength and spirit of nature which had enabled him to resist the lion and the bear, did not enable him to resist his outward temptations, nor to conquer his inward corruptions. He therefore prayed, not only for deliverance "from blood guiltiness," for a grievously remembered sin, he prayed for the *principle* of piety, for the *fountain* of holiness, for "the creation of a clean heart," for "the renewing of a right spirit," for "truth in the inward parts," that the "comfort of God's help might be granted him." This uniform avowal of the secret workings of sin, this uniform dependence on the mercy of God to pardon, and the grace of God to assist, render his precatory addresses, though they are those of a sovereign and a warrior, so universally applied to the case of every private Christian.

One of our best poets—himself an unsuccessful courtier—from a personal experience of the mortifying feelings of abject solicitation, has said, that if there were the man in the world whom he was at liberty to hate, he would wish him no greater punishment than attendance and dependence.

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But he applies the heavy penalty of this wish to the dependents on mortal greatness.

Now, attendance and dependence are the very essence both of the safety and happiness of a Christian. Dependence on God is his only true liberty, as attendance on him is his only true consolation. The suitor for human favor is liable to continual disappointment; if he knock at the door of his patron, there is probably a general order not to admit him. In the higher case, there is a special promise that "to him that knocks it shall be opened." The human patron hates importunity; the heavenly Patron invites it. The one receives his suitor according to his humor, or refuses his admission from the caprice of the moment; with the other "there is no variableness nor shadow of turning;" "Come unto me," is his uniform language.

The man in power has many claims on his favor, and comparatively few boons to bestow; the God of power has all things in his gift, and only blames the solicitor for coming so seldom, or coming so late, or staying so little a while. He only wishes that his best gifts were more earnestly sought.

When we solicit an earthly benefactor, it is often upon the strength of some pretence to his favor—the hope of some reward for past services; even if we can produce little claim, we insinuate something like merit. But when we approach our heavenly Benefactor, so far from having any thing like claim, any thing like merit to produce, our only true, and our only acceptable plea, is our utter want of both claim and merit—is the utter destitution of all that can recommend us; yet we presume to ask favor, when we deserve nothing but rejection; we are encouraged to ask for eternal happiness, when we deserve only eternal punishment. Though we have nothing to produce but disloyalty, we ask for the privilege of subjects; though nothing but disobedience to offer, we plead the privileges of children—we implore the tenderness of a father.

In dependence on God there is nothing abject; in attendance on him, nothing servile. He never, like the great ones of the world, receives the suitor with a petrifying frown, or, what is worse, never dismisses him with a cruel smile and a false promise.

Even if the petitioner to human power escape the vexation of being absolutely rejected; even if his suit be granted, the grant, it may be, is accompanied with a mortifying coldness, with an intelligible hint that the donor expects to

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be no further troubled. The grant may be attended with such a tedious delay, as may make it no benefit. The boon granted does not, perhaps, prove so valuable as the applicant expected; or he finds he might have spent the long season of his attendance, his watching and his waiting, to better purpose; or he might have employed his interest in another quarter, in obtaining something more important; or, after all, he may have received it too late in life to turn it to the profitable account he had expected.

But the almighty Donor never puts off his humble petitioner to a more convenient season. His court of requests is always open. He receives the petition as soon as it is offered; he grants it as soon as it is made; and, though he will not dispense with the continuance of the application, yet to every fresh application he promises fresh support. He will still be solicited, but it is in order that he may still bestow. Repeated gifts do not exhaust his bounty, nor lessen his power of fulfilment. Repeated solicitation, so far from wearying his patience, is an additional call for his favor.

Nor is the lateness of the petition any bar to its acceptance; he likes it should be early, but he rejects it not though it be late.

With a human benefactor, the consciousness of having received former favors is a motive with a modest petitioner for preventing his making an application for more; while, on the contrary, God even invites us to call on him for future mercies, by the powerful plea of his past acts of goodness—"even mercies which have been ever of old." And as past mercies on God's part, so, to the praise of his grace be it said, that past offences on our own part are no hindrance to the application of hearty repentance or the answer of fervent prayer.

The petitioner to human power, who may formerly have offended his benefactor, contrives to soften his displeasure by representing that the offence was a small one. The devout petitioner to God uses no such subterfuge. In the boldness of faith, and the humility of repentance, he cries, "Pardon my iniquity, for it is *great*."

It is no pardon, then, to assert that dependence on God is the only true safety; dependence on him the only true freedom—freedom from doubt, and fear, and sin; freedom from human dependence; above all, freedom from dependence on ourselves. As pardoned sinners, through the redemption wrought for them, find, in the renewed nature, a restoration to that dignity they had forfeited, so those who are most

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destitute of the dignity which arises from this dependence, missing the reality, deceive themselves with the shadow.

He who does not believe this fundamental truth, on which the other doctrines of the Bible are built,—even he who does nominally profess to assent to it as a doctrine of Scripture; yet, if he does not experimentally acknowledge it; if he does not feel it in the convictions of his own awakened conscience, in his discovery of the evil workings of his own heart, and the wrong propensities of his own nature, all bearing their testimony to its truth—such a one will not pray earnestly for its cure—will not pray with that feeling of his own helplessness, with that sense of dependence on divine assistance, which alone makes prayer efficacious.

Of this corruption he can never attain an adequate conception, till his progress in religion has opened his eyes on what is the natural state of man. Till this was the case, he himself was as far from desiring the change, as he was from believing it necessary. He does not even suspect its existence, till he is in some measure delivered from its dominion.

Nothing will make us truly humble, nothing will make us constantly vigilant, nothing will entirely lead us to have recourse to prayer so fervently or so frequently, as this ever abiding sense of our corrupt nature; as our not being able to ascribe any disposition in ourselves to any thing that is good, or any power to avoid, by our own strength, any thing that is evil.

The obligation of Prayer universal—regular seasons to be observed.—The sceptic and the sensualist reject prayer.

Among the many articles of erroneous calculation, to which so much of the sin and misery of life may be attributed, the neglect or misuse of prayer will not form the lightest. The prophet Jeremiah, in his impassioned address to the Almighty, makes no distinction between those who acknowledge no God, and those who live without prayer,—"Pour out thy fury, O Lord, upon the heathen, and upon the families that call not upon thy name."

Some duties are more incumbent on some persons, and some on others; depending on the difference of talents, wealth, leisure, learning, station, and opportunities; but the duty of prayer is of imperative obligation; it is universal,

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because it demands none of any of the above requisites; it demands only a willing heart, a consciousness of sin, a sense of dependence, a feeling of helplessness. Those who voluntarily neglect it, shut themselves out from the presence of their Maker. "I know you not," must assuredly be the sentence of exclusion on those who thus "know not God." Nothing, it is true, can exclude them from his inspection, but they exclude themselves from his favor.

Many nearly renounce prayer, by affecting to make it so indefinite a thing as not to require regular exercise. Just as many, also, unhallow the Sabbath, who pretend they do nothing on week-days which they should fear to do on Sundays. The truth is, instead of sanctifying the week-days by raising them to the duties of Sunday—which is, indeed, impracticable, let men talk as they please—they desecrate the Sunday to secular purposes, and so contrive to keep no Sunday at all.

Stated seasons for indispensable employments are absolutely necessary for so desultory, so versatile a creature as man. That which is turned over to any chance time is seldom done at all; and those who despise the recurrence of appointed times and seasons, are only less censurable than those who rest in them.

Other duties and engagements have their allotted seasons; why, then, should the most important duty in which an immortal being can be employed, by being left to accident, become liable to occasional omission, liable to increasing neglect, liable to total oblivion?

All the various other works of God know their appointed times;—the seasons, the heavenly bodies, day and night, seed-time and harvest,—all set an example of undeviating regularity. Why should man, the only thinking, be the only disorderly work of Almighty power?

But whilst we are asserting the necessity of seasons of prayer, let us not be suspected of attaching undue importance to them; for all these are but the frame-work, the scaffolding, the mere mechanical and subsidiary adjuncts; they are but the preparation for Christian worship; they remind us, they intimate to us, that an important work is to be done, but are no part of the work itself.

They, therefore, who most insist on the value of stated devotions, must never lose sight of that grand and universal prime truth, that wherever we are, still we are in God's presence; whatever we have is his gift; whatever we hope is his promise; feelings which are commensurate with all

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time, all places, and limited to no particular scenes or seasons.

There is in some—in many, it is to be feared—a readiness to acknowledge this general doctrine, which miscalled natural religion teaches; but who are far from including in their system the peculiarities, the duties, the devotions of Christianity. These are decorous men of the world, who, assuming the character of philosophical liberality, value themselves on having shaken off the shackles of prejudice, superstition, and system. They acknowledge a Creator of the universe, but it is in a vague and general way. They worship a Being "whose temple is all space;" that is, everywhere but in the human heart. They put him as far as possible from themselves. Believing that he has no providential care of them, they feel no personal interest in him. God and nature are with them synonymous terms. That the creation of the world was his work, they do not go the length of denying; but that its government is in his hands, is with them very problematical.

In any case, however, they are assured that a Being of such immensity requires not the littleness of superstitious forms, nor the petty limitation of stated seasons and regular devotions; that he is infinitely above attending to our paltry concerns, though he himself anticipated this objection, when he condescended to declare, "He that offereth me thanks and praise, he honoreth me."

One says *he* can adore the Author of nature in the contemplation of his works; that the mountains and fields are *his* altar for worship. Another says, that his notion of religion is to deal honestly in his commerce with the world; both insist that they can serve God anywhere, and everywhere. We know they can, and we hope they do; but our Savior, who knew the whole make of man, his levity, instability, and unfixedness, and who was yet no friend to the formalist or the superstitious, not only commands, at the hour of prayer, our entering into the closet, but our shutting the door a tacit reproof perhaps of the indevotion of the Sadducean, as well as the publicity of the Pharisaic religion, but certainly an admonition of general obligation.

This, indeed, is not the place to enter on that mass of concurring evidence which so irresistibly confirms the especial truth of Christianity. But is it not extraordinary that these men who overlook, or rather inquire not into, that accumulation of evidence in the exhibition of miracles, and the fulfilment of prophecy—that is, who do not read the Bible—

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should not at least attend to one species of evidence more immediately within their reach, and more intelligible to common observation; we mean the confirmation derived to the proofs of Scripture from the history of the world, from their avowal of moral evil, their careful cultivation, where it suits them, of habits of an opposite nature, their practical and prudential maxims, where they have an end to pursue, an interest to gain. Do not similar rules, applied to Christian principles, and delivered in the divine record, prove clearly that our divine Teacher "knew what was in man?"

In treating of prayer, it would be a superfluous labor to address unbelievers with the same arguments or persuasions which we would humbly propose to such as aver, with whatever degree of conviction, their belief in Christianity. It would be folly to address them with motives drawn from a book which they do not believe, or do not read. With those who are ignorant of the first principles of religion, or those who reject them, we have no common ground on which to stand. St. Paul, with his usual discrimination, has left us an example in this as well as in all other cases. With the philosophical Athenians, he confined his reasonings to natural religion. To the Jewish king, Agrippa, who "believed the prophets," in telling the story of his own conversion, he most judiciously introduced the great doctrines of remission of sins and justification by faith.

If the Pyrrhonist in question were to see a genuine Christian character delineated in all its dimensions, marked with its fair lineaments, and enlivened by its quickening spirit, such, for instance, as is exemplified in the character of St. Paul, he would consider it as a mere picture of the imagination, and would no more believe its reality than he does that of Xenophon's Prince, the Stoic's Wise Man, Quintilian's Perfect Orator, or any other Platonic or Utopian representation. Or could he be brought to believe its actual existence, he would set such a man far above the necessity of prayer; he would emancipate him from any such humbling practice; he would enthrone him on his own independent worth; for how should he ever suspect that such a man would ever pray at all, much less would be in prayer more abundant, in humiliation more profound, in self-renunciation more abased?

Is it not probable that some of those inquiring minds who adorned the porch and the academy, as well as those more favored men who saw the future through the dim and distant perspective of prophecy, would have rejoiced to see the things which you see, and have not believed?

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How gratefully would many of these illustrious spirits have accepted advantages which you overlook! How joyfully would they have received from him who cannot lie the assurance that if they would seek of him that truth after which they "were feeling," they should find it! How gladly would that sublime and elegant spirit, whose favorite theme was pure spiritual love, have listened to the great apostle of love; to him who caught the flame as he leaned on the bosom of his affectionate master!

How would this same exalted genius, who taught the immortality of the soul to the bright, yet blind Athenians—he, whose penetrating mind rather guessed than knew what he taught—whose keen eye caught some glimpses of a brighter state through the darkness which surrounded him—how would he have gloried in that light and immortality which the gospel revelation has brought to light! but with what unspeakable rapture would he have learned that he who revealed the life could give it, that he who promised immortality could bestow it! With what obedient transport would he have heard this touching apostrophe, at once a strong reproof and a tender invitation—"Ye will not come unto me that ye might have life!" Ye philosophizing cavillers, who live in the meridian splendor of this broad day, "how will *you* escape, if you neglect so great a salvation?"

But if pride, the dominant intellectual sin, keeps the sceptic aloof from the humiliating duties of devotion; the habitual indulgence of the senses, in another class, proves an equal cause of alienating the heart from prayer.

The man absorbed by ease and enjoyment, and sunk in the relaxing softness of a voluptuous life, has a natural distaste to every thing that stands in opposition to the delights of that life. It is the smoothness of his course which makes it so slippery. He is lost before he feels that he is sinking. For whether we plunge at once from a precipitous height, or slide down from it on an inclined plane, still, while there is a yawning gulf at the bottom, our destruction is equally inevitable.

The systematic but decorous sensualist is one whose life is a course of sober luxury, of measured indulgence. He contrives to reconcile an abandonment of sound principle with a kind of orderly practice. He inquires rather what is decent than what is right; what will secure the favorable opinion of the world, especially his own class, rather than what will please God. His object is to make the most of this world. Selfishness has established its throne in his

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heart. His study is to make every thing and every person subservient to his own convenience, or pleasure, or profit, yet without glaringly trespassing on the laws of propriety or custom. Self is the source and centre of all his actions; but though this governing principle is always on the watch for its gratification, yet, as part of that gratification depends on a certain degree of reputation, it frequently leads him to do right things, though without right motives; for the mainspring sometimes sets the right agoing, as well as the wrong.

He goes to church on all public occasions, but without devotion; gives alms without charity; subscribes to public institutions without being interested in their prosperity, except as they are frequently succeeded by a pleasant dinner and good company, and as the subscription list of names he knows will be published. He lives on good terms with different, and even opposite classes of men, without being attached to any; he does them favors without affection, knowing that he shall have occasion to solicit favors in return, for he never does a small kindness without a view to asking a greater.

He deprecates excess in every thing, but always lives upon its confines.

Prayer enters not into his plan—he has nothing to ask, for he has all in himself—thanksgiving is still less his practice, for what he has he deserves.

He has read that "to enjoy is to obey," and he is always ready to give this cheerful proof of the most unlimited obedience. He respects the laws of the country, especially such as guard property and game, and eagerly punishes the violators of both. But as to the laws of God, he thinks they were made to guard the possessions of the rich, to punish the vicious poor, and to frighten those who have nothing to lose. Yet he respects some of the commandments, and would placard on every post and pillar that which says, "thou shalt not steal;" whilst he thinks that which says, "thou shalt not covet," might be expunged from the decalogue.

If you happen to speak of the helplessness of man, he thinks you are alluding to some paralytic; if of his dependence, to some hanger-on of a great man; if of his sinfulness, he adopts your opinion, for he reads the Newgate calendar. But of sin, as an inherent principle, of the turpitude of sin, except as it disturbs society, he knows nothing; but religion as a principle of action, but prayer as a source of peace or a

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ground of hope, he neither knows nor desires to know. The stream of life glides smoothly on without it; why should he ruffle its placid flow? why should he break in on the course of enjoyment with self-imposed austerities? He believes himself to be respected by his fellow-men, and the favor of God is not in all his thoughts. His real character the great day of decision will discover. Till then he will have two characters.

"Soul, take thine ease, thou hast much goods laid up for thee," is perhaps the state of all others which most disqualifies and unfits for prayer. Not only the apostrophe excites the bodily appetite, but the SOUL is called upon to contemplate, to repose on, the soothing prospect, the delights of that voluptuousness for which the "much goods are laid up." Thou fool! that soul which thou wouldest quicken to such base enjoyment, that soul shall this night be required of thee.

Thus we see what restrains prayer in these two classes of character. The sceptic does not pray, because he does not believe that God is a hearer of prayer. The voluptuary, because he believes that God is such a one as himself, and because he has already gotten all that he wants of him. His gold, and the means of gratifying his sensuality, would not be augmented by the dry duties of devotion; and with an exercise which would increase neither, he can easily dispense.

Errors in Prayer, which may hinder its being answered.—The proud man's Prayer.—The patient Christian.—False Excuses under the pretence of Inability.

ALL desire the gifts of God, but they do not desire God. If we profess to love him, it is for our sake: when shall we begin to love him for himself? Many who do not go the length of omitting prayer, but pray merely from custom, or education, frequently complain that they find no benefit from prayer; others, that they experience not the support and comfort promised to it. May not those who thus complain, and who perhaps are far from being enemies to religion, find, on a serious examination of their own hearts and lives, some irregularity in desire, similar to that just mentioned, to be the cause of their discontent and alleged disappointment?

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We are more disposed to lay down rules for the regulation of God's government, than to submit our will to it as he has settled it. If we do not now see the efficacy of the prayer which he has enjoined us to present to him, it may be producing its effect in another way. Infinite wisdom is not obliged to inform us of the manner or the time of his operations; what he expects of us is to persevere in the duty. The very obedience to the command is no small thing, whatever be its perceptible effects.

Under the apparent failure of our prayers, the source of our repinings must be looked for in the fact of our own blindness and imperfection; for the declarations of the gospel are sure; their answer must be found in the grace of God in Christ Jesus, for his mercies are infallible. Wherever there is disappointment, we may be assured that it is not because he is wanting to us, but because we are wanting to ourselves.

The prophet's expression, "the iniquity of our holy things," will not be thoroughly understood except by those who thus seriously dive into the recesses of their own heart, feel their deficiencies, mark their wanderings, detect and lament their vain imaginations and impertinent thoughts. It is to be regretted that these worldly trifles are far more apt to intrude on us in prayer, than the devout affections excited by prayer are to follow us into the world. Business and pleasure break in on our devotions; when will the spirit of devotion mix with the concerns of the world?

You who lament the disappointment of your requests, suffer a few friendly hints. Have you not been impatient because you receive not the things that you asked at your own time? How do you know that if you had persevered, God might have bestowed them in his time? He certainly would, had he not in his wisdom foreseen they would not have been good for you; and therefore in his mercy withheld them. Is there not some secret, unsuspected infidelity lurking behind such impatience? Is it not virtually saying, there is no God to hear, or that he is unfaithful to his promises? For is it not absolute impiety to insinuate an accusation that the Supreme Judge of men and angels is capable of injustice, or liable to error? God has pleasure in the prosperity of his children. He neither grants nor denies any thing which is not accurately weighed and measured; which is not exactly suited to their good, if not to their request.

If we pray aright, it may please God not only to grant

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that for which we pray, but that for which we do not pray. Supplicating for the best things, we may receive inferior and unrequested things, as was the case with Solomon in his prayer for wisdom. God will not forget our labor of love. If he does not seem to notice it at present, he may lay it by for a time when it may be more wanted.

In prayer we must take care not to measure our necessities by our desires; the former are few, the latter may be insatiable. A murmuring spirit is a probable cause why our petitions are not granted. The certain way to prevent our obtaining what we desire, or enjoying what we have, is to feel impatient at what we do not receive, or to make an improper use of what has been granted to our prayers.

Or you may perhaps address God with sinister and corrupt views; as if you had left his omniscience out of his attributes; as if you thought him such an one as yourself; as if he might be entrapped with the "secret ambush of a specious prayer." Your design in the application of the boon you solicit may not be for his glory. It may be the prayer of ambition, cloaked under the guise of more extensive usefulness; it may be the prayer of covetousness, under the pretext of providing for your family. It may be the prayer of injustice, a petition for success in some undertaking for yourself, to the circumvention of another's fairer claim. God, in mercy to our souls, refuses the gift which would endanger them.

Thus, then, if we ask and receive not, because we ask deceitfully or blindly, we must not wonder if our prayers are not answered. Or, if we obtain what we solicit, and turn it to a bad account, or to no account at all, we must not be surprised if divine grace is withheld or withdrawn.

The same ill results may be expected if we ask formally, or carelessly. Who has not felt that there is a kind of mechanical memory in the tongue, which runs over the form, without any aid of the understanding, without any concurrence of the will, without any consent of the affections? For do we not sometimes implore God to hear a prayer to which we ourselves are not attending? And is not this presumptuously to demand from him that attention which we ourselves are not giving to our own requests, even while we were in the act of making them?

A mere superficial form, by lulling the conscience, hardens the heart. The task is performed, but in what manner, or to what result, is not inquired. Genuine prayer is the homage of the soul to God, and not an expedient to pacify him.

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If you observe the form, but forget the dispositions it is intended to produce, it is evident the end of such prayer is not answered. Yet be not so far discouraged by feeling no sensible effect from prayer as to discontinue it; it is still a right thing to be found in the way of duty.

But, perhaps, you neglect to implore the spirit of Christ towards the direction of your prayers, and his intercession for their acceptance. As there is no other name through which we can be saved, so there is no other through which we can be heard; we must not sever his mediation from his atonement. All his divine offices are not only in perfect harmony, but in inseparable union.* Or perhaps you have used the name of the Redeemer for form's sake, or as an accustomed close to your petitions, without imploring his efficacious grace in changing your heart, as well as in pardoning your sins.

Perhaps you think it a sufficient qualification for acceptable prayer, that you are always forming good intentions; now, though these make up the value of good actions, yet good intentions, not acted upon when occasion invites and duty calls, will not lessen, but inflame the reckoning. For does it not look as if you had resisted the offer of that Holy Spirit which had originally prompted the intention? And may it not induce him to withdraw his blessed influences, when they have been both invited and rejected?

Do you never, by unwholesome reading, fill the mind with images unfavorable to serious exercises? The children of the pure and holy God should feed on the bread of their father's house, and not on the husks of the prodigal.

Do you never use profanely or lightly that name which is above every name? He who made the ear, shall he not hear? and if he has heard, during the day, his awful name used by the thoughtless as an expletive, or by the impious as an interjection or an imprecation, will he in the morning be called on as a Savior, and in the evening as an intercessor?

But no profession of faith, however orthodox, no avowal of trust in Christ, however confident, no entreaty for the aid of the Spirit, however customary, will avail, if it be not such an influential faith, such a practical trust, such a living devotedness, as shall be productive of holiness of heart and

* We observe with regret that in many forms of prayer, the aid of his mediation is much more frequently implored than the benefits of his death and merits. He is, indeed, our divine Intercessor, but his mere intercession is not the whole source of our dependence on him.

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life, as shall tend to produce obedience to the commands, and submission to the will of God. This is an infallible test, by which you may try every doctrine, every principle of the gospel. We do not mean the truth of them, for that is immutable; but your own actual belief, your own actual interest in them. If no such effects are visible, we deceive ourselves, and the principles we defend are not those by which we are governed.

Prayer is so obviously designed to humble the proud heart of the natural man, by giving him a feeling sense of his misery, his indigence, and his helplessness, that we should be unwilling to believe, that even the proudest man can carry his pride to the throne of grace, except to supplicate deliverance from it; yet such a character is actually drawn by him who knew the thoughts and intents of the heart of man, and a little consideration will teach us, that the "two men who went up into the temple to pray" were not intended as individual portraits, but as specimens of a class.

The proud man does not perhaps always thank God that he is not guilty of adultery, or extortion, to which vices he may have little temptation; nor does he glory in paying tithes and taxes, to which the law would compel him. Yet is he never disposed, like the Pharisee, to proclaim the catalogue of his own virtues? to bring in his comparative claims, as if it were a good thing to be better than the bad? Is he never disposed to carry in his eye (as if he would remind his Maker of his superiority) certain persons who are possibly less the objects of divine displeasure than he, by his pride and selfishness, may have rendered himself; although his regularity in the forms of devotion may have made him more respectable in the world than the poor, reprobated being whom he praises God he does not resemble? It is the abasement, the touching self-condemnation, the avowed poverty, the pleaded misery of the destitute beggar that finds acceptance. It is the hungry whom God's mercy fills with good things, it is the rich in his own conceit whom his displeasure sends empty away.

Whenever you are tempted to thank God that you are not like other men, compare your own condition with that of the afflicted and the bereaved among your own friends; compare yourself with the paralytic on his couch, with the blind beggar by the wayside, with the laborer in the mine; think on the wretch in the galleys; on the condemned in the dungeons of despotic governments; on the miserable beings in our own prisons, those loathsome abodes of sin and wretch

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edness. Above all, think—and this is the intolerable acme of sin in the inflictor, and of misery in the sufferer—think on the wretched negro chained in the hold of a slave ship! Think seriously on these, and put pride into your prayer if you can. Think on these, not to triumph in your own superiority, but to adore the undeserved mercy of God, in giving you advantages to which you have no higher claim, and let your praise of yourself be converted into prayer for them.

For there are no dispositions of the heart which are more eminently promoted by prayer than contentment and patience. They are two qualities of the same color, but of different shades, and are generally, when found at all, found in the same breast. Both are the offspring of genuine religion, both nurtured by cordial prayer. The cultivation of the one, under easy circumstances, prepares for the exercise of the other under more trying situations. Both emanate from the same divine principle, but are drawn out by different occasions, and varying circumstances.

Content is the tranquillity of the heart, prayer is its aliment; it is satisfied under every dispensation of Providence, and takes thankfully its allotted portion, never inquiring whether a little more would not be a little better; knowing that if God had so judged, it would have been as easy for him to have given the more as the less. That is not true content which does not enjoy as the gift of infinite wisdom what it has, nor is that true patience which does not suffer meekly the loss of what it had, because it is not his will that it should have it longer.

The contentment of the irreligious man is apathy, his patience either pride or insensibility. The language of the patient man under trials is, it is the Lord. Shall a living man complain? is his interrogation. "A good man," says Solomon, "is satisfied from himself." Here the presumptuous might put in *his* claim to the title. But his pretension arises from his mistake, for his satisfaction is *with himself*, that of the Christian with Providence; it arises from the grace of God shed abroad in his heart, which is become a perennial spring of consolation and enjoyment; and which, by persevering prayer, is indented into his very soul. Content knows how to want and how to abound; this is the language of equanimity: "Shall I not receive evil from the hand of the Lord, as well as good?" this is the language of patience in speaking of providence. Content is always praising God for what she possesses; patience is always justifying him for what she suffers. The cultivation of the one effectually pre-

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pares us for the exercise of the other. But these dispositions are not inherent in the human heart. How are they generated? by the influences of the Holy Spirit. How are they kept alive? by heartfelt devotion.

The prosperous man of the world, exulting in any recent success, may acknowledge, "the Lord gave," but it is only Christian patience can say, "the Lord taketh away," and even bless him for the resumption of his gift. The contented, patient Christian has the same keen feelings, the same fond attachments with other men, for, though his passions are regulated by religion, they are not totally extinguished.

Under the pressure of any affliction, *thy will be done*, as it is the patient Christian's unceasing prayer, so it is the ground of his unvarying practice. In this brief petition he finds his whole duty comprised and expressed. It is the unprompted request of his lips, it is the motto inscribed on his heart, it is the principle which regulates his life, it is the voice which says to the stormy passions, "Peace! be still!" Let others expostulate, he submits. Nay, even submission does not adequately express his feelings. We frequently submit, not so much from duty as from necessity; we submit, because we cannot help ourselves. Resignation sometimes may be mere acquiescence in the sovereignty, rather than conviction of the wisdom and goodness of God; while the patient Christian not only yields to the dispensation, but adores the dispenser. He not only submits to the blow, but vindicates the hand which inflicts it; "the Lord is righteous in all his ways." He refers to the chastisement as a proof of the affection of the chastiser. "I know that in very faithfulness thou hast caused me to be afflicted." He recurs to the thoughtlessness of his former prosperity: "Before I was afflicted I went astray;" and alludes to the trial less as a punishment than a paternal correction. If he prays for a removal of the present suffering, he prays also that it may not be removed from him till it has been sanctified to him. He will not even part from the trial till he has laid hold on the benefit.

Perhaps the impediment which hinders the benefit of prayer in characters apparently correct, may be the fatal habit of indulging in some secret sin, the private cherishing of some wrong propensity, the entertaining of some evil imagination. Not being accustomed to control at other times, it intrudes when you would willingly expel it; for a guest which is unreservedly let in at other seasons, and cordially entertained, will too frequently break in when you desire to be alone.

The Scriptures are explicit on this subject. It is not

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merely the committing actual sin that ruins the comfort growing out of prayer; the divine prohibition runs higher; its interdiction is more intimately interior; it extends to the thoughts and intents of the heart. The door of heaven is shut against prayer under such circumstances. "If I regard iniquity in my *heart*, the Lord will not hear me." A cherished corruption in the mind is the more likely to interpose between God and the soul, because it does not assume the shape and bulk of crime. A practical offence, the effect of sudden temptation, is more likely to be followed by keen repentance, deep self-abasement, and fervent application for pardon; whereas to the close bosom sin, knowing that no human charge can be brought against it, the soul secretly returns with a fondness facilitated by long indulgence, and only whetted by a short separation. Vain, covetous, malignant, impure thoughts, habitually fostered by the imagination, are more likely to start out into action, are a more probable preparation for a bolder sin, than many who indulge them believe or intend.

It was, perhaps, this acute, experimental feeling which led David to pray to be delivered from "secret sins;" these, he was probably conscious, had led to those "presumptuous sins," which had entangled his soul and embittered his life; and whose dominion he so frequently and fervently deprecates. This, it is to be feared, may be the case with some, whose language and exterior cause them to be ranked with the religious; these are, at least, the dangers to which they are most exposed. It is, therefore, that our Lord connects, in indissoluble union, watching with prayer.

Perhaps, when the conscience is more than usually awakened, you pray with some degree of fervor to be delivered from the guilt and punishment of sin. But, if you stop here, your devotion is most imperfect. If you do not also pray to be delivered from its power and dominion over your heart and life, you do not go much further than the heathens of old. They seem to have had a strong feeling of guilt, by their fond desire of expiating it by their sacrifices and lustrations.

Of their terror of its punishment we have many intimations in their fables; for what is fable to us was probably to them obscure history, or wild tradition worked up into an absurd but amusing mythology. The eternity of their punishments is strongly implied in the insatiable thirst and ungratified appetites of Tantalus; his misery augmented by that flowing water and those tempting fruits which hung in his

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sight and mocked his appetites, not unlike the anguish of Dives, which was rendered more intolerable by beholding the blessedness of those on the other side of the great gulf. The profitless toils of Sisyphus, and of the daughters of Danaus, whose ever-failing efforts prove their labors to be infinite and their punishment eternal. The wheel of Ixion, which, as it was to be in perpetual motion, so the punishment was to have no end; a doctrine not so strongly held by many Christians as it seems to be implied in this blind mythology.

Will you not then be most unweariedly fervent in prayer to the God of mercy, for deliverance from the dominion of that sin which, if not forsaken as well as lamented, will be inevitably followed by that punishment which you deprecate, and which will never end? But such is the love of present ease, and the desire of respite, that you think, perhaps, it is better not "to be tormented before the time." How many now in a state of irreversible misery wish they had been tormented sooner, that they might not be tormented forever! But with you it is not yet too late. With you the day of grace, which to them is over, is not yet past. Use it then without delay, instead of persisting in laying up fresh regrets for eternity.

But too many deceive themselves, by imagining that when they have pronounced their prayer, the duty is accomplished with the task, the occult medicine being taken, the charm is to work of itself. They consider it as a duty quite distinct and unconnected with any other. They forget that it is to produce in them a principle which is to mix with all the occurrences of the day. Prayer, though not intended as a talisman, is yet proposed as a remedy. The effect of its operation is to be seen in assisting to govern the temper, in bridling the tongue, in checking not only calumny, but levity, not only impure, but vain conversation.

But we have a wonderful talent at deceiving ourselves. We have not a fault for which we do not find an apology. Our ingenuity on this head is inexhaustible. In matters of religion men complain that they are weak, a complaint they are not forward to urge in worldly matters. They lament that their reluctance to pray arises from being unable to do what God, in his word, expects them to do. But is not this virtual rebellion, only with a smooth face and a soft name? God is too wise not to know exactly what we *can* do, and too just to expect from us what we *cannot*.

This pretence of weakness, though it looks like humility, is only a mask for indolence and a screen for selfishness.

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We certainly *can* refuse to indulge ourselves in what pleases us, when we know it dipleases God. We *can* obey his commandments with the aid of the infused strength which he has promised, and which we *can* ask. It is not he who is unwilling to give, but we who are averse to pray. The temptations to vice are strengthened by our passions, as our motives to virtue are weakened by them.

Our spiritual enemy would not be so potent, if we ourselves did not put arms into his hands. The world would not be so powerful an enchantress, if we did not assist the enchantment, by voluntarily yielding to it; by insensibly forsaking him who is our strength. We make apologies for yielding to both by pleading their power and our own weakness. But the inability to resist is of our own making. Both enemies are indeed powerful, but they are not irresistible. If we assert the contrary, is it not virtually saying "greater are they that are against us than he that is for us?"

But we are traitors to our own cause; we are conquered by our own consent; we surrender, not so much because the conqueror is powerful, as because the conquered is willing.

Without diminishing any thing of *his* grace and glory, to whom every good thought we think, every victory over sin we obtain, is owing, may it not add to our happiness, even in heaven, to look back on every conflict we maintained with our grand spiritual enemy, every triumph over the world, every victory over ourselves? Will not the remembrance of one act of resistance then, far surpass every gratification now, which the three confederated enemies of our souls may present to us?

It is not merely by our prayers that we must give glory to God. Our divine Master has expressly told us wherein his Father is glorified; it is "when we bring forth much fruit." It is by our works we shall be judged, and not by our prayers. And what a final consummation is it that obedience to the will of God, which is our duty here, shall be our nature hereafter! What is now our prayer shall then be our possession; there the obligation to obey shall become a necessity, and that necessity shall be happiness ineffable.

The various evils here enumerated, with many others not touched upon, are so many dead weights on the wings of prayer; they cause it to gravitate to earth, obstruct its ascent, and hinder it from piercing to the throne of God.

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God our Father.—Our Unwillingness to please Him.—Forms of Prayer.—Great and Little Sins.—All Sin an Offence against God.—Benefit of Habitual Prayer.

THE distinction between the personal nature of faith and the universal character of charity, as it is exercised in prayer, are specifically exhibited in the two pronouns which stand at the head of the creed and of the Lord's prayer. We cannot exercise faith for another, and therefore can only say, *I* believe. But when we offer up our petitions, we address them to *our* Father, implying that he is the author, governor, and supporter, not of ourselves only, but of his whole rational creation. It conveys also a beautiful idea of that boundless charity which links all mankind in one comprehensive brotherhood. The plural *us*, continued through the whole prayer, keeps up the sentiment with which it sets out, tends to exclude selfishness, and to excite philanthropy, by recommending to God the temporal as well as spiritual wants of the whole family of mankind.

The nomenclature of the Divinity is expressed in Scripture by every term which can convey ideas of grandeur or of grace, of power or of affection, of sublimity or tenderness, of majesty or benignity; by every name which can excite terror or trust, which can inspire awe or consolation.

But of all compellations by which the Supreme Being is designated in his holy word, there is not one more soothing, more attractive, more endearing than that of FATHER; it includes the idea of reconcilement, pardon, acceptance, love. It swallows up his grandeur in his beneficence. It involves also the inheritance belonging to our filial relation. It fills the mind with every image that is touching, and the heart with every feeling that is affectionate. It inspires fear softened by love, and authority mitigated by gratitude. The tenderest image the Psalmist could select from the abundant storehouse of his rich conceptions, to convey the kindest sentiment of God's pity towards them that fear him, was that it resembles the pity of a "father for his *own children*." In directing us to pray to our Father, our divine Master does not give the command without the example. He everywhere uses the term he recommends. "I thank thee, Oh Father, Lord of heaven and earth!" and in the seventeenth of St. John he uses this endearing name no less than seven times.

"Lord, show us the Father and it sufficeth," was the ill-understood prayer of the inquiring disciples. To us this pe-

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tition is granted before it is made. Does not he show himself to all as a Father, in the wonders of his creation, in the wonders of our being, preservation, and support? Has he not, in a more especial manner, revealed himself to us as a Father in the sublime wonders of his word, in the unsearchable riches of Christ, and the perpetuated gift of the Holy Spirit? Does he not show himself our Father, if, when we have done evil, he withholds his chastening hand; if, when we have sinned, he still bears with us; if, when we are deaf to his call, he repeats it; if, when we delay, he waits for us; if, when we repent, he pardons us; if, when we return, he receives us; if, when in danger, he preserves us from falling; and if, when we fall, he raises us?

We have a beautiful illustration of the goodness of God as a merciful and tender Father in the deeply affecting parable of the prodigal son. Though the undone spendthrift knew that he had no possible claim on the goodness he had so notoriously offended, yet he felt that the endearing name of father had an eloquence that might plead forgiveness of his offence, though he feared not for a restoration to affection and favor. But while he only meekly aspired to a place among the servants, while he only humbly pleaded for a little of their redundant bread, he was received as a pardoned, reconciled, beloved child.

Yet the human heart is not easily warmed into gratitude, or softened into love, or allured to imitation, because it takes only slight and transient views of the divine benignity. What God has done for us, and what we have really done against ourselves, will, in the great day of decision, crown him with glory, and ourselves with shame. What we think we do for our own benefit in temporal concerns is so animated, so earnest, so unremitted, what we are called to do for God—which ultimately, indeed, would be done for ourselves—is so little, so reluctant, so heartless, as to bear no sort of comparison. In the former case, every thing is a gratification; in the latter every thing is a sacrifice.

We think much of the smallest instance of self-denial if it be for God; if it be an act of acknowledgment to the most gracious of all Fathers; if it be a tribute of homage to the King of kings, however large or lasting the promised recompense. But we think little of any present privation of our own, if it insure to us a longer subsequent enjoyment, though but for a season.

In speaking of the manner in which we should address our heavenly Father, it is to be observed there may be evident

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differences in the state, both of the mind and circumstances, for which the best written forms of prayer can make no provision. We ourselves can alone know those varieties, and the petitions which expressly belong to them. We are sometimes under the influence of particular tempers, which we wish to cultivate and improve: in this case, we shall naturally use addresses very different from those which the prevalence of unfavorable tempers or wrong dispositions require.

As to the outward events in which we are concerned—for *accident* is a term which has no place in the Christian's vocabulary—God in every dispensation is at work for our good. In more prosperous circumstances he tries our gratitude; in mediocrity our contentment; in misfortunes our submission; and as every new situation calls into exercise some new virtue, by consequence it calls for some alteration in the mode of our devotions. The prayers of yesterday and to-day will consequently be as different as the circumstances. These are some of the advantages of private over public prayer.

The great and general topics are, however, of a fixed, unalterable nature, on which, though we may be more or less diffuse, according to the state of the mind, yet the term and spirit will require little variation. This is more especially the case with respect to praise and thanksgiving; and to express these, the use of stated forms may occasionally come in with much advantage, as the cardinal points to be expressed here must be ever the same. Invariably must the glory and honor of whatever is good be ascribed to the great source of light and life, the giver of every good and perfect gift; and the addition in secret, of particular clauses of praise for personal mercies, will not be difficult to find where gratitude is really felt.

A deep sense of his corruption will powerfully draw the real penitent to an humbling avowal of sin in prayer; but it is to be feared that some, who, because they cannot charge themselves with flagrant offences, do not consider a contrite confession of the sins of the heart, and of the daily life, an indispensable part of their devotions. But God will charge many with sin who neglect to charge themselves. Did they attend to the remonstrances of a conscience not laid asleep by neglect, or quieted by palliatives, they would find that were the daily *omissions* alone, of even their best days, registered and presented to them, they would form no inconsiderable catalogue for repentance.

There are too many who do not consider that all sins are equally a breach of the divine law. Without pretending to

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bring all sins, small and great, to one common level, we should remember that *all* sin is an offence against a gracious Father.

In that profoundly self-abasing prayer of David after the commission of the two black offences which disgraced his otherwise exemplary life; though he deeply felt his barbarous treatment of his brave general, in first dishonoring his wife, and then exposing him to meet inevitable death in the fore-front of the hottest battle; yet, in praying to be delivered from this blood-guiltiness, he bequeathed an important lesson to posterity, when, in the lowly prostration at the throne of God, his first cry was, "Against *thee, thee* only, have I sinned, and done this evil in *thy* sight;" plainly declaring, that all sin is, in the first instance, a sin against God.

While the most worldly are ready enough to exclaim against notorious sins, or against any sins carried to the greatest excess, to smaller offences they contrive to be tolerably reconciled. They think the commission of these not inconsistent with the profitable use of prayer in their formal way of using this customary exercise.

They are also sufficiently lenient to certain degrees of great sins; and various are the modifications and distinctions in their logic, and not over-correct the gradations in their moral scale of degrees. They do not consider that it is the extirpation, and not merely the reduction, of any sin, which is to procure them that peace and comfort for which they sometimes pray, and which they wonder they do not receive as an answer to their prayers.

They forget that the evil of sin is not to be measured by its magnitude only, but by the spirit of disobedience which it indicates towards a generous Father,—a Father whose commands are all founded in mercy and love, and who considers every voluntary fault as no light offence when committed against supreme authority, exercised with perfect tenderness.

But it is their reluctance to part with the remaining degrees, their wish to retain these modified sins; it is their favorite reserves to which they still cling, that prevent that peace which is promised to the victory, I had almost said to the omnipotence, of prayer.

For it is not so much the nicely measured quantity, as the nature of sin, which constitutes its malignity, and obstructs the benefit of prayer. The inferior degree which is cherished, will, without earnest supplication to God, be ready to become the excess which is deprecated, whenever the appropriate temptation shall present itself. For, however our compas-

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sionate Father may pardon the unpremeditated fault, yet how can we expect him to forgive any degree of sin that is allowed, that is even, in a certain measure, intended to be committed? Diminution, however, is a favorable step, if, by perseverance in prayer, it leads gradually to extirpation.

Habitual prayer may prove a most effectual check to any doubtful or wrong action, to which circumstances may invite us during the day on which we are entering; the very petition to our heavenly Father "deliver us from evil," forcibly felt and sincerely expressed, may preserve us from being seduced into it. And is not the praying Christian less likely to "fall into temptation," than they who neglect to pray that they may not be led into it?

The right dispositions of the heart and the fervor of devotion reciprocally excite each other. A holy temper sends us to prayer, and prayer promotes that temper. Every act of thanksgiving tends to make us more grateful, and augmented gratitude excites more devout thanksgiving.

The act of confession renders the heart more contrite, and deeper contrition induces a more humbling avowal of sin. Each, and all, send us more cordially to the Redeemer: the more fervent the prayer, the more entire is the prostration of the whole man at the foot of the cross.

The Doctrine of Imputed Sanctification, newly adopted.—The old one of Progressive Sanctification newly rejected.—Both Doctrines injurious to Prayer.—St. Paul's Character.

We have hitherto spoken of errors in prayer. We come now to errors of opinion, which supersede the necessity of prayer itself. There are moral as well as speculative corruptions gaining ground amongst us, and there is an involution of one in the folds of the other. When men once indulge themselves in any deviation from the course so plainly marked out in that only unerring *road-book*, the gospel of Jesus Christ, they can never be sure where the first turning off may lead them.

When a man, with more ingenuity than sober judgment, wishes to introduce a novel error; in order to work successfully, and prevent the suspicion of his design, he commonly seizes on some acknowledged truth for his basis. On this truth he raises his own fanciful superstructure, but with little

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departure at first from his avowed design; so that his gradual deviation from it makes the error continue still to look so much like truth, that ordinary observers will not easily detect where the old truth ends, or where the new fabrication totally changes the character of the original edifice.

The great and glorious doctrine of the New Testament was to exalt the Savior and to humble the sinner; the new doctrine is to exalt the sinner also, and in that proportion to establish and secure him in sin. For if the Savior's righteousness by transfer becomes so far the believer's righteousness, as to become, in the new language, his own personal holiness, he has in his own person "whereof to glory," and any further attainment is anomalous; or at best this transfer is even less rational, and evidently more removed from common sense as well as from charity, than the doctrine of supererogation itself; for that only teaches that some men were rich in good works enough and to spare; but this, instead of the friendly disposal of such superfluous wealth, teaches that we have none worth keeping, and that if we had there is a provision made for rendering it utterly useless.

A distorted truth, then, is worse than an original falsehood, because it deceives the injudicious and ill-informed by retaining some little vestige of the truth they had been taught to venerate. Thus, they who pretend to add new glory to the character and offices of Christ, are in effect dishonoring by misrepresenting him. It is a fearful fact, that the holiest doctrine may be perverted, till, instead of its being the source of salvation, it becomes a fountain of impiety. Instead of humbling the sinner, it confirms him in sin; instead of purifying, it corrupts; instead of sobering, it inebriates; and lands him on a daring and presumptuous confidence. Instead of promoting the cause of God, as it professes, it advances that of Satan. It is a false light which leads to utter darkness, for "if the light which is in thee be darkness, how great is that darkness!"

This error is so much worse than any other sin, as by fair and legitimate deduction it renders all virtue anomalous, and consequently all prayer ridiculous. Virtue cannot be needed, where to be like-minded with Christ is replaced, or made synonymous with having his holiness substituted for our own; and prayer cannot be upheld in any one of its essential qualities, where no room is left in the heart for self-distrust, meekness, lowliness of spirit, the fear of offending God, and the sense of dependence on him for "more grace."

Much has also been advanced in favor of another kindred

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doctrine, a doctrine with which St. Peter must have been utterly unacquainted, when he exhorted his converts to "GROW in grace and in the knowledge of Jesus Christ." The preceding opinion having encouraged the new proselytes, for they can create as well as destroy, has called another into existence, *that there is no such thing as progressive sanctification.* This novel doctrine, if practically adopted, would not fail to contribute its full share to the extermination of any remains of moral goodness, which its precursor might have left behind. It may indeed deserve some little toleration, when its founder shall have been able to produce one individual child of Adam who is already as good as he ought to be, or even as he might have been.

If this doctrine be true, a large portion of Scripture must be abandoned to the clippers and mutilators of the sacred volume; for what becomes of the gracious promise of being "renewed from day to day?" what of the precept "to increase and abound more and more?" what of the incessant inculcation of this command, repeated in all the various forms which language could supply; a command of which neither the variety of the illustration, nor of the language which conveys it, ever alters the idea, an idea which, like a golden thread, runs through the whole fabric of the New Testament?

We have been accustomed to hear that fervent prayer, through the influence of the Divine Spirit, is the grand instrument of this renewal; and it is on this ground that we have ventured to introduce the subject here, as connected with the general design of these pages. But the present doctrine completes what the former had commenced, and renders prayer wholly inapplicable to all spiritual ends: it leaves us nothing to implore, but merely temporal advantages; to ask for things only which will end when this life ends. It would abolish the necessity of every petition in the Lord's prayer, except that for our daily bread.

Why will not those who profess to make the Bible the only rule of their faith and practice, learn from that Bible, that diffidence and reverential awe, a frank avowal of their own ignorance, a humble withholding from intruding into unrevealed things, and devout gratitude for the glorious things which are revealed, best become blind, ignorant and dependent creatures?

If this newly-invented doctrine were true, what would become of the useless interval of life, useless as to all possibility of improvement, which is the great end of life, the inter-

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val between the decisive moment of complete sanctification and our closing scene?

The unanswerable argument in favor of progressive holiness, is the progress itself. The man to whom it was asserted, that there was no such thing as motion, made the most definitive answer,—he got up and walked.

Every advance of the Christian inclines him to push on to still further advances. But under the influence of this stationary principle the busy current of life would become a stagnant pool. It is motion which gives the sense of spiritual, as well as natural life. It is progress which gives the sustaining feeling; not of independent, but of infused strength. Hope, which is the pulse of spiritual life, would not only intermit, but stand still. "Is this all?" would the disappointed Christian say. "Shall I never be more holy than I now am? I do not find the right sort of rest in being a fixture." Torpor is not ease, numbness is not relief. It is exercise, not indolence, which induces safe and wholesome repose.

New difficulties, fresh trials, unknown temptations may yet assail us in our mortal journey, which will require new applications to the throne of grace for support. With that support promised to prayer, though "Alps on Alps arise," we need not be discouraged. For if our progress be an upward, it is an onward path, and the acclivity diminishes the higher we ascend. Difficulties may be great, but with the grace of God they will not be insuperable. God is not only strong, but Strength. Yet let us not aim at an ascent above our promised support. In aspiring to reach a visionary elevation, we lose the height we had actually gained.

It is curious to observe how naturally one invention involves another. We find an instructive illustration of this truth in a pagan fable. Dædalus was not only made a prisoner himself in the labyrinth of his own projecting, but, like the projectors of the new theological metaphysics, he was no sooner involved in its mazes, than he went on to study a new and still wilder contrivance. But his next invention, his wings of wax, in which he trusted to secure his flight, in their ultimate result betrayed their insufficiency. His incautious companion, by mounting above the prescribed region of safety, exposed his artificial wings to be melted by the sun, as a punishment for approaching it too nearly. His fate was the inevitable consequence of his temerity.

If we were completely and instantaneously sanctified, such a state would boldly contradict the character of our human condition, everywhere described in Scripture, namely, that

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life is to the end a journey, a conflict, a race, a warfare; whereas in the new scheme all would be peace: the Christian would have no more to tempt, no more to fear, no more to resist; in short, earth would be heaven.

Every thing that is great is progressive. The noblest things are the longest in attaining their perfection. This analogy subsists in nature, and in grace. Surely, then, there is no assignable period when our virtues will be incapable of addition; when our duties will be finished; when our piety will have soared to such a pitch as to render a higher elevation impossible, as to render prayer not only unnecessary, but absurd.

Saint Paul's conversion was indeed instantaneous, but it was miraculous. Yet, though it was attended with circumstances peculiar to itself; though the shining light from heaven surrounded him; though, to evidence the miracle, he heard the voice of the Lord Jesus himself; though his natural sight was taken from him, preparatory to the opening of his spiritual eyes; though his change was of this distinguished character, yet did he stop short there? So far from it, he only began to cry out, "Lord, what wilt thou have me to *do?*" Thus we see, that the instantaneous conversion was prayer; practical prayer; prayer with involved doing; prayer which denoted progress.

If ever progressive sanctification was exhibited in the life, as well as writings, of any one man more than another, it was in this heroic champion of divine truth. If ever one man more than another had a right to depend on his own safe state, it was the divinely illuminated Saint Paul.

Yet did *he* spend is after-life in self-satisfaction and indolent security? Did *he* ever cease to watch, or pray, or labor? Did *he* ever cease to press the duty of prayer on his most established converts? Did *he*, in the confidence of supremely eminent gifts, ever cease himself to pray? Were *his* exertions ever abridged? *his* self-denial ever diminished? Did *he* rest satisfied with present, though supernatural attainments? Did *he* remember the things which were behind? Did *he* live upon the good he had already done, or the grace he had already received? Did *he* count himself to have attained? Did he stop in the race set before him? Did not he press forward? Did not his endeavors grow with his attainments? Did not his humility and sense of dependence outstrip both? If *he* feared being a castaway, after the unutterable things he had seen and heard, and after the wonders he had achieved, shall the best man on earth be contented to

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remain as he is? If it were attempted, the most sanguine man on earth would find it to be impossible; nothing either in nature or in grace "continueth in one stay." He who does not advance is already gone back. This glorious, because humble apostle, went on in progressive sanctification; he continued to grow and to pray, till he at length attained the measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ.

But what enabled this unparalleled man to maintain, to the end, this painful conflict? It was the same support which is still offered to the meanest Christian. It was humble, fervent, persevering prayer. It was the spirit of supplication, infused and sustained by "the renewing of the Holy Ghost," and presented through the divine Mediator.

And what the apostle did in his own person, we repeat, he unweariedly pressed upon all his converts. He exhorted them to pray for themselves, and for each other, in the same spirit in which "he bowed his own knees unto the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, that they may be strengthened with might by his Spirit in the inner man; that Christ might dwell in their hearts by faith; that they might be rooted and grounded in love; that they might know the love of Christ, which passeth knowledge; that they might be filled with all the fulness of God."

It is obvious why God does not give us the full measure of his grace; it is in order that we may be induced to pray for it; and that prayer which we are commanded continually to repeat for greater degrees of grace, is a standing proof of that imperfection in us which requires it; is a perpetual intimation, that we stand in need of fresh supplies and larger measures of this superinduced strength than we have yet attained.

A sincere Christian must know, because he must feel, that he is an imperfect Christian; and to rest satisfied in a state of imperfection is not "fighting the good fight," is not "finishing our course" in the way our beginning promised. As we advance, Providence assigns us new employments, new trials. Sanctification will never have reached its ultimate point, without that persevering progress which the Scriptures everywhere inculcate. Do we not rob ourselves of the reward promised to those who strive to go on unto perfection, if we are stopped short by the fatal delusion that we have already reached it?

There is a fearful denunciation in the Apocalypse, and it is made the closing passage of the sacred canon; it is made a fence, as it were, to shield divine truth from the additions and

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mutilations of bold intruders; no less than a tremendous menace, that "to him who adds unto these things, God shall add to him the plagues written in this book. To him that takes away, God shall take away his part out of the book of life."

Character of those who expect Salvation for their Good Works.—Of those who depend on a Careless, Nominal Faith.—Both these characters unfavorable to Prayer.—Christianity a Religion of Love which disposes to Prayer, exhibited in a third character.

We proceed now to make some observations on two different classes of Christians, who, without neglecting prayer, obstruct its efficacy by certain opinions in immediate connection with their practice; opinions which, though in direct opposition to each other, yet, if Christianity be true, are neither of them safe.

The one, with a pretence of faith, profess to know God; but in works, in a great measure, deny him; the other are working out their own salvation, but it is without fear or trembling; they work in their own strength, without looking unto God to enable them "to will and to do of his good pleasure."

While multitudes are ruining themselves by a fatal reliance on the merit of their own works, it is, perhaps, not saying too much to assert that more are undone by a loose, traditional, unexamined dependence on the Savior. If many are wrong who think to purchase heaven by their own industry, more err by this cheaper mode of an indefinite and careless reliance on the ill-understood promises of the gospel. If we cannot, of these two evils, determine which is greatest, it would not be difficult to prove that both are equally unfavorable to fervent prayer.

The careless liver who trusts in an unfounded hope, deceives himself, because he thinks his trust, though he never inquires into it, looks more like grace.

Good works are rather less likely to deceive always, because those who maintain their superiority as a doctrine, cannot but see how far they fall themselves, in practice, short of their profession; so far as to render it evident, that good works are with much greater sedulity performed by that sound class of Christians who utterly reject any confidence

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in the performance of them. The former make salvation the easiest possible acquisition; the other believe it to be difficult, but fancy that the difficulty is to be overcome by a few more good deeds; which, shall we say, is the more misleading opinion?

Yet it must be confessed, that in this age of speculative religion, many do not sufficiently insist on these indispensable indications of a true and lively faith. For, after all, are not the right actions of a consistently holy life the most unequivocal outward signs of an inward and spiritual grace? Not to insist on them, is to despise the value of those substantial evidences which our Lord himself made the criterion by which to judge of men,—"by their fruits ye shall know them." The tree of life is no barren tree; it bears all manner of fruits.

There is indeed less necessity than ever to decry good works. Men are not so violently addicted to them as, by the warnings given against them, one might be led to suppose. To exalt good works as the procuring cause of salvation is to put them in the place of Christ. To depreciate good works is to depreciate such a life as Christ has given us both the command and the example to lead; that command, of which the language was always one, "if ye love me, keep my commandments;" and that example which presents such a tissue of holy actions as nothing but Divinity could exhibit, yet enlightened and assisted humanity may and must aspire to imitate.

With this command and this example, devotion was always indissolubly connected. Previously to giving his divine pattern for the due performance of prayer, he alluded to the actual duty as already well understood and regularly practised; for doubtless he had habituated them to the duty, before he said, "*When* ye pray,"—"After this manner therefore pray you."

Faith is the principle which first led the sinner to apply for grace and mercy to the Redeemer of sinners. It is the same principle which, by its gradual operation, leads to the renewing of his nature, the purifying his heart, and the sanctifying his conduct. This faith, with its practical consequences, must be sought for by the only means through which it can be obtained, the influence of the Holy Spirit on humble, fervent, spiritual prayer.

But there is another, and, it is to be feared, a large class, who do good without being good. Though this may be too frequently the case; though it is the motive which determines

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on the quality of the action, yet, if the best action will not save the best man, there is little hope of its efficacy towards the salvation of a bad one.

Perhaps the man in question is charitable; but his charity may be stimulated by his vanity—a too common, but most misleading motive. Perhaps he does a deed of bounty from the too usual hope that this good action may be thrown into the opposite scale against a bad one; perhaps he hopes that his acts of benevolence may atone for the irregularities of a disorderly life: but, be this as it may, do not discourage his giving, let him continue to give; the act may improve the principle, he may in time detect the difference of his internal feelings in the performance of a good and bad action. Perhaps the repetition of his good deeds may lead to a diminution of his bad ones. The passion of shame sometimes operates usefully, and every passion, being under the control of God, may eventually be made the instrument of good.

And who does not remember instances in which the frequently repeated bounty was the unprompted feeling of a compassionate and liberal heart, of a heart tender and kind, though yet unsanctified by religion?

Yet who would restrain the right action? Who would forbid the gentle deed of charity? Who would wish to aggravate his, perhaps, awful account, by withholding his hand? Who would willingly add this omission of what is right to his aggregate sum of what is wrong? Who would not even hope that it may prove a leading step to what is better? Who would not hope that, as good principles naturally tend to good actions, yet, though it is reversing the usual order for the stream to lead back to the fountain, yet who knows but the repetition of good actions may not only deter him from such as are bad, but may put his mind into such a frame as may lead him to examine the true principle of action, and thus to find, that though he has unhappily begun at the wrong end, that the right end is not even yet unattainable? Who can say that he may not be brought to examine his own heart, and be thus brought to the exercise of cordial prayer; by that he will be taught to know that "if any man will do the will of God, he shall know of the doctrine whether it be of God.,,

Our compassionate Redeemer cherished every hopeful appearance. When he saw some symptoms of goodness in the young ruler "he loved him." But his amiableness was not religion. Though his obedience to the commandments was less defective than that of many a high professor; like

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others, who confidently trust in their own merit, he inquired not, it is to be feared, so much for improvement, as from a sense of conscious integrity and the hope of commendation—he inquired what was yet wanting to the perfection of his character.

He who knew all things, already knew that his love of money was greater than his love of God. Here he saw that this promising character was vulnerable. The one thing he wanted was more than the many things he possessed. He failed in the trial. He had some concern about his soul, but more about his money; "he went away sorrowing," because he could not secure the one without the sacrifice of the other.

This is, with *us*, as much a test of character now, as it was then. It is not until we see a man acting in direct opposition to his predominant sin that we can venture to hope that he is renewed in the spirit of his mind, that he is even got on right ground. Zaccheus, who probably set out worse than the ruler, obtained this grand victory which the other missed.

This promising young man, in proclaiming his obedience to the commands, did not, however, boast of his devotion; yet, in so moral a character, we cannot suppose that prayer was altogether neglected; but it must have been that prayer of which our Lord says, "this people draweth nigh unto me with their mouth, and honoreth me with their lips, their heart is far from me." Had it been sincere prayer, it would have been influential prayer. No slave to avarice *can* worship God in spirit and in truth, and it is such that the Father seeketh to worship him. While the heart remains unchanged, the temper unsanctified, and the life unfruitful, the prayer has not been "the effectual, fervent prayer which availeth much."

But there is a third character, who, thinking both the others lately noticed to be wrong, is determined himself to be right. He divides the difference, and adopts half of the scheme of each. He approves of works, but doubts their unassisted efficacy to obtain salvation. He honors the Redeemer, and places confidence in his sacrifice; but it is not a full, entire, unmeasured, confidence. He thinks the Savior so far competent towards effecting part of his salvation that he cannot be saved without him, but dares not trust him with the whole. So, without intending to be profane, he enters into a kind of partnership with him whose blood was made a full, perfect, and sufficient oblation, and satisfaction

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for the sins of the whole world. He proposes to contribute his own share to a contract of his own making, trusting that, as the Savior knows he is not perfect, he will graciously supply whatever is deficient in his services, and make up what is lacking to their perfection, he himself continuing to be the working partner.

But if he be a thinking and a feeling character, if he be sincere in his desire after divine truth, though ignorant of its true nature, he at length begins to find that the plan, which he once thought so admirably contrived, does not answer He finds that his spiritual interests do not advance. He begins to discover that his faith is cold, even his work is sluggish, and its progress unsatisfactory. His exertions want the inspiring principle, they want a genuine faith. He begins to discover, that even his good actions, on which he had been accustomed to rest half his salvation, are exceeded by those persons who do more, and put no trust in them. He at length, through the influence of divine grace, begins to discover, or rather to feel, that while one party is exclusively exalting faith and the other works, both seem to have forgotten, or rather not to have known, that there is a third, a heavenly principle, a sacred cement, without which their separation might be eternal, and even their junction would be imperfect. This sacred principle is LOVE. He now knows, experimentally, that Christianity is a religion of the affections, a sentiment of the heart; that it demands and confers that charity without which faith is dead, and works are vain. It is that heavenly sentiment, the love of God in Christ shed abroad in the heart, without which he that liveth is counted dead—that principle, without which the gift of prophecy, of mysteries, and all knowledge are unavailing—without which, giving all the goods to the poor, and even the body to be burned, will not profit—it is that indestructible attribute, which, when prophecies shall fail, and tongues shall cease, and knowledge vanish away, will *never* fail—it is that perfect thing which shall subsist when "that which is in part shall be done away." Love will survive when faith shall become sight, and hope shall be fruition. It shall constitute our happiness when we shall know God "even as we are known." We shall possess it in its plenitude, when we shall awake up after his likeness. For love, like every other holy disposition, is but an emanation of the perfections of God, a spark from the original flame, an assimilation to his nature; since God is love.

In faith there may be fear; in works there may be con-

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straint; but the inspiring, invigorating, endearing principle of love changes the fearful slave into the affectionate child; transforms *him* whom he had degraded as a hard master into a tender father. This love makes labor light, service freedom, dependence safety, duty delight, sufferings easy obedience pleasure, submission choice. By the warmth with which he now cultivates this "unction from the Holy One, he will be rendered more meet for that fulness of joy which is at his right hand for evermore.

He has now completely found his own utter insufficiency for this great work. He is in the situation of the newly converted apostle, who had doubtless previously exercised a regular but formal devotion, but it never would have been said of him before—"behold he prayeth!" He begins with lowly prostration to besiege the throne of grace; he now prays with a fervor he never felt before. He goes on to feel, not only its necessity, but its efficacy; gradually acknowledges its transforming power, and in time becomes sensible that its consolations are neither few nor small.

He now sees objects with other eyes, the visual ray is purged; to his rectified optics "trees are become men." He now exclaims, "not of works, lest any man should boast." But though he has left off boasting, he is so far from having left off working, that he is far more active in good deeds, than when he trusted they would carry him to heaven; superinduced humility has completely led him to the secrets of his own heart. He feels wants and desires of which he was never before sensible; and wants felt readily find a tongue, readily suggest unbidden prayer, unprompted praise. Prayer is become the very breath of his being; praise is so much his delight, that he almost forgets it is his duty. It is no longer his task, but his refreshment. What lately seemed a necessary drudgery, the severe injunction of a hard master, is now the pleasant service of an affectionate child.

He is deeply grieved at the time he has lost, but he is no less disposed to retrieve than to lament the past. He has found that the soul will not be saved where the heart is not renewed. Of that renewal, by the influence of the Divine Spirit, he is become more and more sensible in his devotional exercises. With a deeper sense of imperfection as he becomes less imperfect, he is yet sensible of new dispositions, of new energies, of a heart to trust, and a will to obey. He feels an increasing desire of conformity to his Divine Savior, and such a growth in grace, that with him to will and to do is almost become the same thing.

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All the faculties which God has given him are filled with the idea of God. He retains him in his *memory* by the recollection of his mercies—he retains him in his *understanding*, by meditating on his perfections. By this intelligent faculty he reflects on what God is in himself, in his word, and to his own soul. In his *will*, he loves God, and laments that he ever loved any thing in comparison of him. Thus all his intellectual powers, voluntarily as it were, press into the worship of God, or, in the fewer and better words of the Psalmist, he summons them all to assist in his devotions, saying, "Let all that is within me praise the Lord."

Prayer.—The Condition of its Attendant Blessings.—Useless Contention about Terms.

Men contend more about words than about things. A misunderstanding respecting them causes more disputes than the subjects of which they are the signs. In speaking, for instance, of the connection between prescribed duties and promised blessings, are there not certain inoffensive and well-meaning words which seem to have brought more reproach on those who use them than their harmless, if not legitimate character, may be thought to deserve. One of them, indeed, might expect more gentle treatment on the single ground that it is very frequently to be found in the holy Scriptures.

The obnoxious terms to which we here allude are *rewards* and *conditions*. We have, in general, avoided the use of them, not for any harm discoverable in them when used and understood in the scriptural sense, but for fear of creating an idea contrary to what was intended to be conveyed. In the legal sense they are very exceptionable, for in the one case we deserve nothing from God, and in the other we can do nothing of *ourselves*.

We do not presume to make conditions with God, but he condescends to propose them to us. In this latter case, it is free grace imposes the reasonable condition; his free grace bestows the unmerited reward. Are not all the promises of the gospel conditional? The beatitudes include both the condition and the reward. Our blessed Savior, in his sermon, multiplies and individualizes his promises. He gives us a string of articles of blessedness and recompense; the specific recompense to the specific duty; amongst others,

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mercy to the merciful; the kingdom of heaven to those who are persecuted for righteousness' sake; the vision of God to the pure in heart.

The Holy Spirit consecrates the doctrine of *rewards*, by teaching the apostle to connect it even with the very being of Omnipotence. "God *is*," and it immediately follows, that "he is a *rewarder* of them that seek him." Surely this is a condition, as much as the threat that he will punish those "who know not God." Everywhere, and particularly in the Psalms, prayer is made the condition of obtaining. In asking, seeking, and knocking, the condition and the reward most appropriately meet.

To those who come to the Redeemer, he has declared that "they shall in no wise be cast out." Their coming is the condition of their being accepted. "Rest," again, is the consoling promise which he makes to "the heavy laden" who come to him. "He that honoreth me I will honor," is both a condition and a reward. What is the promise of pardon to repentance but a condition? The negative denunciation is a condition. "Ye will *not* come to me, that ye might have life." "Without holiness no man shall see the Lord; without faith it is impossible to please God." Do not these imply the blessings attending the contrary temper? State the question thus: Shall we be heard if we do not pray? Shall we be pardoned if we do not repent?

"Eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, the things which God hath prepared for them that love him." It is the love of God, then, which is the condition of obtaining those things which the heart of man cannot conceive.

All the promises made to faith are conditions, as are those made to holiness. The good and faithful servants who well employed their ten and five talents, were rewarded by having their talents doubled; the punishment of their unprofitable companion was a conditional punishment. He had made no use of what was committed to him.

Why is that bright variety of promises, "to him that overcometh," repeated with such unwearied iteration, in the sublime visions of the saint at Patmos? What is it but a beautiful concatenation of conditions and rewards, closed with that joyful climax, "he that overcometh shall be a pillar in the temple of the Lord, and shall go no more out." If language more clear can be found, if assurance more explicit can be given, if promises more distinct can be produced, we confess we know not where to look for them. Did not Moses himself, the most disinterested of men, look to the recom-

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pense of the reward? And did not a greater than Moses, "for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame?"

Promises like these were the support, and joy, and triumph of his immediate apostles, and of their remotest successors; of Ridley, of Latimer, and Cranmer. They will still be the consolation of the Christian sufferer for righteousness' sake to the end of time. Let us not then forfeit our inheritance by slighting the promise. "This is a reward wholly of grace in respect of our deserving, but of justice, on account of the purchase of it by the sacred treasures of Christ's blood, and the unchangeable tenor of the gospel, wherein God promises heaven to all obedient and true believers."

The things may be called by other names, but they amount to the same meaning. There is a proud disinterestedness which would seem to intimate, that, because we deserve nothing we expect nothing. Our expectation, it is true, arises entirely from God's goodness, and not at all from our merit. It arises especially from his fidelity, which leads him to make good his own engagement. He has himself said, "faithful is he that has promised."

This view of the subject deducts nothing from that free salvation purchased for us by the death of the Redeemer. We repeat, it deducts nothing from the sovereignty of God. All the promises are the gracious offers of an amnesty by an insulted King, who condescends to offer a treaty to his rebellious subjects. We deserve nothing at his hands. He owes us nothing. Punishment we do indeed deserve "if he were extreme to mark what is done amiss;" yet he declares that punishment is his strange work. He has reversed the attainder, by the sacrifices of his Son. The attainted rebel, instead of disputing about the terms of reconciliation, instead of proposing terms of his own, thankfully accepts what the king offers. Though our pardon hangs on a firm belief in the great truths he has revealed, let us not so explain these as to hazard or neglect the duties he has enjoined us to perform. If our faith, though sincere, is often weak, let us remember, that our obedience is even more imperfect than our faith; and let us, by fervent and unremitting prayer, labor at once to build up our faith which is weak, and to perfect our obedience which is defective.

God not only pardons as a merciful king, he enacts laws as a wise legislator; still the old revolutionary principles are continually breaking out; to check which the sovereign proposes *terms* as proofs of our allegiance. He does by no

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means annex salvation to them, but he requires them as marks of our repentance, as confirmations of our loyalty. He requires them as evidences, both of our faith and of our submission. By the infusion of a new spirit of life consequent on his pardon, the acquitted rebel adopts a new set of principles, which show themselves by overt acts, suggested and nourished by fervent prayer.

We are aware that the term "evidences," used above, is to many no less revolting than those which we have previously noticed, but by this excessive affectation of disinterestedness and refining on the promises, we shall come to do away all moral obligation, we shall attenuate the substantial realities of Christianity into a meagre theory, reduce the fruitful principle of practical religion to a dry and unproductive speculation, a barren thing, to which nothing that is perceptible, palpable, tangible, and practical, is necessarily appended.

On the other hand, it is but too notorious, that the terms here humbly attempted to be vindicated and restored to their true signification, are too frequently made the sum and substance, the whole of religion, till the spirituality of the gospel, and the great peculiarities of the religion of Jesus, are smothered in the heap of frigid human ethics.

It is by the promises annexed to these conditions that the Christian is gradually brought to consider prayer not merely as a duty, but to value it as a privilege; and the more earnestly he cultivates the spirit of supplication, the more deeply will it enable him to penetrate into the recesses of his own heart. The more he discovers the evils which he there finds, he will be so far from being deterred by the discovery from approaching to the fountain of mercy, that it will lead him to be more diligent, as well as more fervent, in his application there. Nothing so favorably discovers to us our spiritual exigencies, nothing can quicken our petitions for their relief so powerfully, as the conviction of their actual existence. In this full conviction, in this earnest application, the Christian at length feels the efficacy of prayer in its consolations, its blessedness, in its transforming power.

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Vain Excuses for the Neglect of Prayer.—The Man of Business.—Case of Nehemiah.—Prayer against the Fear of Death.—Characters to whom this Prayer is Recommended.

THERE are not a few who offer apologies for the neglect of spiritual duties, by saying they believe them to be right, but that they are tempted from the exercise of them by idleness, or business, by company, or pleasure. This may be true, but temptations are not compulsions. The great adversary of souls may fill the fancy with alluring images of enjoyment, so as to draw us away from any duty, but it is in our own choice to indulge, and through grace to repel them. He may act upon the passions through outward objects, which introduce them to the mind through the senses, but the grace of God enables all who faithfully ask it to withstand them.

If we were not at liberty to reject temptation, sin would be no sin. It is the offer of the grace of resistance not used, which makes the offender to be without excuse. All the motives and allurements to sin would be ineffectual, would we keep up in our minds what are its "wages"—death; death spiritual, death eternal!

Of all the excuses for the neglect of prayer, the man of business justifies his omission to himself by the most plausible apologies. Many of this class, active for themselves, and useful to the world, are far from disputing either the propriety or the duty of prayer; they are willing, however, for the present, to turn over this duty to the clergy, to the idle, to women and children. They allow it to be an important thing, but not the most important. They acknowledge, if men have time to spare, they cannot spend it better; but *they* have no time. It is indeed a duty, but a duty not to be compared with that of the court, the bar, the public office, the counting-house, or the shop.

Now, in pleading for the importance of the one, we should be the last to detract from that of the other. We only plead for their entire compatibility.

We pass over the instance of Daniel, a man of business and a statesman, and of many other public characters, recorded in Scripture, and confine ourselves to the example of Nehemiah. He was not only an officer in the court of the greatest king of the East, but it was his duty to be much in the royal presence. He was on a particular occasion under

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deep affliction; for Jerusalem was in ruins! On a certain day his sadness was so great as to be visible to the king, at whose table he was attending.

The monarch inquired the cause of his sorrow, and what request he had to make. He instantly "prayed to the God of heaven," doubtless to strengthen him, and then made his petition to the king for no less a boon than to allow him to rebuild the walls of the sacred city. His prayer preceded his request. It was that prayer which gave him courage to present that petition, and which perhaps induced the sovereign to grant it. What a double encouragement is here given to the courtier, both to pray to God, and to speak truth to a king!

Though the plea of the man of business, for his own particular exemption, can by no means be granted, yet it is the sense he entertains of the value of his professional duties which deceives him. It leads him to believe, that there can be no evil in substituting business for devotion. He is conscious that he is industrious, and he knows that industry is a great moral quality. He is rightly persuaded that the man of pleasure has no such plea to produce. He therefore imposes on himself, with the belief that there *can* be no harm in substituting a moral for a religious exercise; for he has learned to think highly of morality, while he assigns to religion only an inferior degree in his scale of duties.

He usually goes to church once on the Sunday; but it does not at all infringe on his religious system to examine his accounts, to give a great dinner, or to begin a journey on that day.

Now it is a serious truth, that there is no man to whom prayer is more imperatively a duty, or more obviously a necessity, than to the man of business; whether in the higher or the middle classes of society. There is no man who more stands in need of quieting his anxieties, regulating his tempers, cooling his spirits by a devout application for the blessing of God; none to whom it is more necessary to implore the divine protection for the duties, or preservation from the dangers of the scene in which he is about to engage; none to whom it is more important to solicit direction in the difficulties which the day may produce; none on whom it is more incumbent to solicit support against the temptations which may be about to assail him; none to whom the petition for an enlightened conscience, an upright intention, a sound probity, and an undeviating sincerity, is of more importance.

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What is so likely as prayer to enable him to stand prepared to meet the accidental fluctuations in his affairs; to receive without inebriation a sudden flow of prosperous fortune, or to sustain any adverse circumstance with resignation?

Even persons in more retired situations, even those who have made considerable advances in religion, cannot but acknowledge how much the ordinary and necessary cares of daily life, especially how much any unexpected accession to them, are likely to cause absence and distraction in their devotions. How much, then, ought they whose whole life is business, to be on their guard against these dangers, to double their vigilance against them, and to implore direction under them?

Were the Christian soldier accustomed never to engage in the moral battle of daily life without putting on this panoply, the shafts of temptation would strike with a feeble and erring blow; they would not so deeply pierce the guarded heart. And were fervent, humble, daily prayer once conscientiously adopted, its effects would reach beyond the week-day engagements. It would gradually extend its benign influence to the postponing of settling accounts, the festive dinner, and the not absolutely necessary journey, to one of those six days in which we are enjoined to labor. It would lead him to the habit of doing "no manner of work" on that day in which the doing of it was prohibited by the great Lawgiver in his own person.

We have more than once alluded to the diversities of character, occasional events, difference in the state of mind as well as of circumstances, which may not only render the prayer which is suitable to one man unsuitable to another, but unsuitable to the same man under every alteration of circumstances.

But among the proper topics for prayer, there is one which, being of universal interest, ought not to be omitted. For by whatever dissimilarity of character, capacity, profession, station, or temper, the condition of man, and of course the nature of prayer, is diversified, there is one grand point of union, one circumstance, one condition, in which they must all meet; one state, of which every man is equally certain; one event which happeneth to all—"it is appointed unto every man once to die." The rugged road of sorrow, the flowery path of pleasure, as well as

"The paths of glory, lead but to the grave."

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In praying, therefore, against the fear of death, we do not pray against a contingent, but a certain evil; we pray to be delivered from the overwhelming dread of that house which is appointed for all living—we are put in mind that all who are born must die!

"The end of all things is at hand." To what purpose does the apostle convert this awful proclamation? Does he use it to encourage gloomy tempers, to invite to unprofitable melancholy? No: he uses the solemn admonition to stir us up to moral goodness—therefore "be sober"—he does more, he uses it to excite us to religious vigilance—"and watch unto prayer."

Some men, and they are not the best men, talk boldly of death, especially while they suppose it to be at a distance; but this boastful heroism is a very equivocal symptom of their being in a proper state to meet it. Others of a less confident, but not more serious cast of mind, take pains to keep it as far as possible from their thoughts, lest the indulging such gloomy reflections should make them uneasy, and embitter their present enjoyments. They banish it, indeed, from their thoughts, as they do other unpleasant subjects; but it is no proof that we do not fear a thing because we manage to keep it out of sight; on the contrary, the effort betrays the very fear which it denies.

There is an inconsistency in the character of man, so preposterous, that we should not believe it, if we did not feel as well as see it. We continue eagerly to catch at the things which are always sliding from us, and which no grasp of ours can retain, whilst we forget the things that are not only hastening to meet us, but which will remain with us, not through time only, but eternity.

Others are afraid to think of death for the same reason that they are afraid to make their will, lest it should bring it nearer; but we know that we will keep up the remembrance without accelerating the approach; familiarity with the thought is the best means of conquering the fear. It is not pusillanimity, but prudence, so to fear death as to fear to meet it in an unprepared state of mind; and that fear will always be safe and salutary which leads to the preparation.

Prayer against the fear of death, by keeping up in us a constant remembrance of our mortality, will help to wean us from a too intimate attachment to the things we are so soon to quit. By this habitual preparation to meet our Judge, we shall be brought to pray more earnestly for an interest in the great Intercessor, and to strive more effectually against

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every offence which may aggravate the awfulness of that meeting. Above all, such a prayer will more emphatically remind us that it was sin which brought death into the world, which introduces that original principle and first act of sin, from which all our natural evil and practical offences are derived.

But let us not be accustomed to think of death as a detached and separate object, as the mere insulated circumstance of its closing our eyes forever on all we have been accustomed to cherish; let us not think of it only as a consignment to the narrow chambers of the tomb, but let us ever connect with the idea of death the consoling assurance that to the real Christian its sting is drawn out; this will fill the heart with boundless love and endless gratitude to him who has extracted it. This thought of death, though it will keep up in the mind the anticipation of that night, which, as to this world, shall know no morning, will also keep up the glorious prospect of that eternal day which shall know no night.

Fervent prayer that divine grace may prepare us for death, will, if cordially adopted, answer many great moral purposes. It will remind every individual of every class that "the time is short"—that "there is no repentance in the grave."

To the *man of opulence*, who heapeth up riches and cannot tell who shall gather them, prayer will be a constant memento: it will remind him that he walketh in a vain shadow, and disquieteth himself in vain; it will remind him of laying up treasures where thieves cannot enter, nor rust corrode.

The habit of praying against the fear of death would check the pride of youthful *beauty*, by reminding her how soon it must say to the worm, thou art my father, and to corruption, thou art my mother and sister.

The *man of genius*, he who thought that of making many books there would be no end; who, in his zeal to write, had neglected to pray; who had thought little of any immortality but that which was to be conferred by the applause of dying creatures like himself; who, in the vanity of possessing talents, had forgotten that he must one day account for the application of them; if happily he should be brought to see the evil of his own heart, to feel the wants of his own soul, how intense will be his repentance that he had loved the praise of men more than the praise of God! how fervently will he pray that his mercies may not aggravate the account

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of his sins; that his talents may not become the instrument of his punishment! how earnestly will he supplicate pardon, how devoutly will he "give glory to God, before his feet stumble on the dark mountains!"

The *man of business*, to whom we have already adverted, who thought his schemes so deeply laid, his speculations so prudently planned, that nothing could frustrate them; who calculated that the future was as much in his power as the present, forgot that death, that grand subverter of projects, might interpose his *veto*. This man, who could not find time to pray, must find time to die; he may at length find—happy if he ever find it—that he cannot meet his end with a peaceful heart and a resigned spirit, without the preparation of prayer for support in that awful period "when his purposes shall be broken off and all his thoughts perish."

The *man of pleasure*, alas! what shall we say for *him*? He is sunk to the lowest step of degradation in the moral scale; he has not even human supports; he has robbed himself even of the ordinary consolations resorted to by ordinary men. He has no stay on which to lay hold, no twig at which to catch, no pretence by which to flatter himself into a false peace, no recollection of past usefulness; he has neither served his country, nor benefited society—what shall we say for him? If he pray not for himself, we must pray for him; with God all things are possible.

The *patriot*, indefatigable in the public service, distinguished for integrity, but neglecting the offices of Christianity; whose lofty character power had not warped, nor cupidity debased, but whose religious principles, though they had never been renounced, had not been kept in exercise; a spirit of rare disinterestedness; a moralist of unblenched honor, but who pleaded that duty had left him little time for devotion! Should divine grace incline him at last to seek God, should he begin to pray to be prepared for death and judgment, he will deeply regret, with the contrite cardinal, not that he served his king faithfully, but that his higher services had not been devoted to their highest object. In this frame of mind, that ambition which was satisfied with what earth could give, or kings reward, will appear no longer glorious in his eyes. True and just to his king, devoted to his country, faithful to all but his God and himself, he now laments that he had neglected to seek a better country, neglected to serve the King Eternal, the blessed and only Potentate; neglected to obtain an interest in a kingdom which shall not be moved. He feels that mere patriotism,

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grand as is its object, and important as is its end, will not afford support to a soul sinking at the approach of the inevitable hour, at the view of final judgment.

The *hero*, who, in the hot engagement, surrounded with the "pride, pomp and circumstance of war," bravely defied death, forgot all that was personal, and only remembered, nobly remembered, his country and his immediate duty;—animated with the glory that was to be acquired with his arm, and almost ready to exclaim with the Roman patriot,

"——————What pity
That we can die but once to serve our country!"

yet this hero, if he had ever made a conscience of prayer, may he not hereafter find that the most successful instrumentality is a distinct thing in itself, and will be different in its results, from personal piety? May he not find that, though he saved others, himself he cannot save?

If, however, in after-life, in the cool shade of honorable retirement, he be brought, through the grace of God, to habituate himself to earnest prayer, he will deeply regret that he ever entered the field of battle without imploring the favor of the God of battles; that he had ever returned alive from slaughtered squadrons without adoring the Author of his providential preservation. If his penitence be sincere, his prayer will be effectual. It will fortify him under the more depressing prospect of that death which is soon to be encountered in the solitude of his darkened chamber, without witnesses, without glory, without the cheering band, without the spirit-stirring drum, without the tumultuous acclamation; with no objects to distract his attention, no conflicting concerns to divide his thoughts, no human arm, either of others or his own, on which to depend. This timely reflection, this late, though never *too* late prayer, may still prepare him for a peaceful dying bed; may lead him to lean on a stronger arm than his own, or that of an army; may conduct him to a victory over his last enemy, and thus dispose him to meet death in a safer state than when he despised it in the field; may bring him to acknowledge that while he continued to live without subjection to the Captain of his salvation, though he had fought bravely, he had not yet fought the good fight.

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The Consolations of Prayer.—Its Perpetual Obligation.

In addition to what has already been observed, as to convenient seasons for prayer, we cannot but remark that many Christians have been enabled to convert their trials into blessings, by gradually bringing themselves to devote the hours of wakeful and even painful nights to devout meditation and prayer. By doing at first some violence to their inclinations, they have afterwards found in it both profit and pleasure. The night has been made to them a season of heart-searching thought and spiritual consolation. Solitude and stillness completely shut out the world—its business, its cares, its impertinences. The mind is sobered, the passions are stilled, it seems to the watchful Christian as if there were in the universe only God and his own soul. It is an inexpressible consolation to him to feel that the one Being in the universe who never slumbereth nor sleepeth, is the very Being to whom he has free access, even in the most unseasonable hours. The faculties of the mind may not, perhaps, be in their highest exercise, but the affections of the heart, from the exclusion of distracting objects, more readily ascend to their noblest object. Night and darkness are no parasites; conscience is more easily alarmed. It puts on fewer disguises. We appear to ourselves more what we really are. This detection is salutary. The glare which the cheerful daylight, business, pleasure and company, had shed over all objects, is withdrawn. Schemes which in the day had appeared plausible, now present objections. What had then appeared safe, now, at least, seems to require deliberation. This silent season of self-examination is a keen detecter of any latent evil, which, like the fly in the box of perfume, may corrupt much that is pure.

When this communion with God can be maintained, it supplies deficiencies of devotion to those who have little leisure during the day; and, by thus rescuing these otherwise lost hours, it snatches time from oblivion, at once adds to the length of life, and weans from the love of it.

If the wearied and restless body be tempted to exclaim, "would God it were morning!" the very term suggests the most consoling of all images. The quick mind shoots forward beyond this vale of tears, beyond the dark valley of the shadow of death; it stretches onward to the joyful morning of the resurrection; it anticipates that blessed state where there is no more weeping and no more night—no weeping,

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for God's own hand shall wipe away the tears; no night, for the Lamb himself shall be the light.

If disqualifying pain, or distressing languor, prevent the utterance of supplication, patience is itself a prayer, and a prayer which will not fail to be heard. We have a striking instance of an answer to silent prayer in the case of Moses. In a situation of extreme distress, when he had not uttered a word, "the Lord said unto him, I have heard thy crying."

The tender mercy of our compassionate Father will make sense and find meaning in a prayer which is almost unintelligible to the languid sufferer who offers it. God wants not to be informed, he wants only to be remembered, to be loved, to be sought.

If, however, in the conduct of this nightly watching, and this nightly prayer, your own stock of thought or expression is absolutely deficient, prophets and apostles will not only afford you the most encouraging examples, but most perfect assistance. More especially the royal treasury of king David lies open to you; and whatever are your wants, there your resources are inexhaustible.

What joyful appeals does the Psalmist make to him, to whom the darkness and the light are both alike! "Have I not remembered thee in my bed, and thought upon thee when I was waking?" "In the night," he again exclaims, "I commune with my own heart and search out my spirit." And of this holy practice was he so little weary, that he resolved to persevere in it. "As long as I live will I magnify thee in this manner." Similar to this is the apostrophe of the evangelical prophet—"With my soul have I desired thee in the night."

The Psalms of David exhibit the finest specimen of experimental religion in the world. They are attended with this singular advantage and this unspeakable comfort, that in them God speaks to us and we speak to him. This delightful interlocution between the King of saints and the penitent sinner; this interchange of character, this mixture of prayer and promise, of help implored and grace bestowed, of weakness pleaded and strength imparted, of favor shown and gratitude returned, of prostration on one part and encouragement on the other, of abounding sorrow and overflowing mercy—this beautiful variety of affecting intercourse between sinful dust and infinite goodness, lifts the abased penitent into the closest and most elevating communion with his Savior and his God.

Yet, inestimable as are the Psalms of David, in every point

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of view, and especially for the purpose here recommended, as a refuge for the suffering body, the wakeful mind, the praying spirit, and the oppressed heart—that very sanctity and depth of devotional feeling, which is their life-blood, may lead to a dangerous misapplication in the mouth of the irreligious. Holy expressions in prayer, and ebullitions of grateful praise, are more easily committed to the memory than impressed upon the heart. And is there not some danger that not only the mere formalist, but even the immoral man, may apply to himself sentiments, declarations, assurances, and comforts, which can only belong to the real Christian? For instance, the arrogant man, as if, like the dervise in the Persian fable, he had shot his soul into the character he assumes, repeats with complete self-application, "Lord, I am not high minded;" the trifler says, "I hate vain thoughts;" the irreligious, "Lord, how I love thy law." He who seldom prays at all, confidently repeats, "All the day long I am occupied in thy statutes." The covetous, in the words of Paul or David, with as much self-complacency deprecates avarice as if the anathema against it had ever opened either his heart or his purse.

On the other hand, as the hardest substances, by continual attrition, are at length penetrated, it is the pleasing task of charity to hope that the habitual repetition of such feelings, sentiments and principles, may sink into the hard heart, may lead its possessor to look into himself, to compare what he feels with what he reads, and by discovering the discrepancy between his life and his prayers, may open his eyes on his own danger, till by the grace of God the holy vehicle of his hypocrisy may be made that of his conversion.

Perhaps you are a doubting, weak and trembling penitent; not indeed doubting of the mercies of God, but of your own interest in them. This feeling may arise from a deep and humbling sense of your own sins and infirmities, rather than from any criminal unbelief. Here comes in to your relief a whole host of gracious promises, peculiarly adapted to your case: the tender images of "the smoking flax," and "the bruised reed," the promised acceptance of "the contrite spirit and the broken heart." But beyond all praise is the consoling assurance of our great High Priest, that "he is touched with the feeling of our infirmities." Touched with them not only when he was "a man of sorrows and acquainted with grief," but now when he is even "ascended to the glory which he had with his father before the world began."

How soothing is this expression of the divine compassion!

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It is not barely the hearing or the seeing, it is the *feeling* of our infirmities. He was in all points tempted like as we are. This is the most exquisite touch of sympathy: he not only suffered, but was tempted; here indeed the resemblance has its limitation, for he was without sin. He knew the condition of "being tempted," but not that of yielding to it. It is this feeling of being tempted which gives him such an intimate concern in the feeble, fearful Christian. He sends the angel of his presence, and saves them. What a striking confirmation of the blessed truth, that in all our afflictions he is afflicted, is the awful interrogation, "Saul, Saul, why persecutest thou"—not my church, but "*me?*"

It is a further encouragement to the dejected spirit, that the Almighty was not contented to show his willingness to pardon by single declarations, however strong and full. He has heaped up words, he has crowded images, he has accumulated expressions, he has exhausted language, by all the variety of synonymes which express love, mercy, pardon and acceptance. They are graciously crowded together, that the trembling mourner who was not sufficiently assured by one, might be encouraged by another. And it is the consummation of the divine goodness, that this message is not sent by his ambassador, but that the King of kings, the blessed and only Potentate, condescends himself to pronounce this royal proclamation, "The Lord, the Lord God, merciful and gracious, long-suffering and abundant in goodness and truth, keeping mercy for thousands, forgiving iniquity, transgression and sin!" Forgiving, indeed, but in consonance with his just demand of repentance and reformation, "who will by no means clear the guilty."

The ardent and affectionate Apostle of the Gentiles, within a very few verses, has also represented the Almighty under every character that is endearing and consoling. He denominates him "the God of patience and of comfort," "the God of hope and of peace;" titles which are peculiarly addressed to all the exigences of man, and graciously expressive of God's will and power to supply them. There is an appropriation of the terms to the state of the fallen children of mortality, calculated to take away all fear, and to fill the vacant room with love, and peace, and gratitude unspeakable!

Refuse not then to take comfort from the promises of God, when perhaps you are easily satisfied with the assurance of pardon from a frail and sinful creature like yourself, whom you had offended. Why is God the only being who is not

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believed—who is not trusted? O thou that hearest prayer, why unto thee will not all flesh come?

But though God's pardoning grace knows no bounds, his sanctifying grace is given by measure, is given as we use what we have already received. God seems to reserve in his own hands a provision for our humility, and thus keeps prayer in full exercise. The one is progressive in its operation, the other is full and free, bestowed, not for any righteousness in the receiver, but for that full and perfect oblation once made for sin. Is it not a most fallacious trust to expect that our sins will be blotted out without that habitual repentance annexed to the promise? It is vain to offer the bribe of burnt-offerings, the thousands of rams, or the rivers of oil. God desires not to be paid for our pardon, nor profited by our offerings. He never sells his favors. The riches of the universe, which are indeed already his, could not procure the pardon of a single sinner; but he prescribes the duty when he promises the pardon. "Repent, that your sins may be blotted out."

It would therefore supply ample matter for habitual prayer, had we only the sins of our nature to lament; but when to these we add our practical offences, oh how great is the sum of them! Yet though they are more than we can express, they are not greater than God can forgive; not more than the blood which was shed for them can wash out.

But he to whom the duty of prayer is unknown, and by whom the privilege of prayer is unfelt, or he by whom it is neglected, or he who uses it for form and not from feeling, may probably say, will this work, wearisome even if necessary, never know an end? Will there be no period when God will dispense with its regular exercise? Will there never be such an attainment of the end proposed, as that we may be allowed to discontinue the means?

To these interrogatories there is but one answer; an answer which shall be also made by an appeal to the inquirer himself.

If there is any day in which we are quite certain that we shall meet with no trial from Providence, no temptation from the world, any day in which we shall be sure to have no wrong tempers excited in ourselves, no call to bear with those of others, no misfortune to encounter, and no need of divine assistance to endure it, on that morning we may safely omit our prayer.

If there is any evening in which we have received no protection from God, and experienced no mercy at his hands;

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if we have not lost a single opportunity of doing or receiving good, if we are quite certain that we have not once spoken unadvisedly with our lips, nor entertained one vain or idle thought in our heart, on that night we may safely omit to praise God, and the confession of our own sinfulness; on that night we may safely omit humiliation and thanksgiving. To repeat the converse would be superfluous.

When we can conscientiously say that religion has given a tone to our conduct, a law to our actions, a rule to our thoughts, a bridle to our tongue, a restraint to every wrong passion, a check to every evil temper, then, some will say, we may safely be dismissed from the drudgery of prayer; it will then have answered all the end which you so tiresomely recommend. So far from it, we really figure to ourselves, that if we could hope to hear of a being brought to such perfection of discipline, it would unquestionably be found that this would be the very being who would continue most perseveringly in the practice of that devotion which had so materially contributed to bring his heart and mind into so desirable a state, who would most tremble to discontinue prayer, who would be most appalled at the thought of the condition into which such discontinuance would be likely to reduce him. Whatever others do, he will continue forever to "sing praises unto thee, O thou Most Highest; he will continue to tell of thy loving kindness early in the morning, and of thy truth in the night season."

It is true, that while he considered religion as something nominal and ceremonial, rather than as a principle of spirit and of life, he felt nothing encouraging, nothing refreshing, nothing delightful in prayer. But since he began to feel it as the means of procuring the most substantial blessings to his heart; since he began to experience something of the realization of the promises to his soul, in the performance of this exercise, he finds there is no employment so satisfactory, none that his mind can so little do without, none that so effectually raises him above the world, none that so opens his eyes to its empty shadows, none which can make him look with so much indifference on its lying vanities, none that can so powerfully defend him against the assaults of temptation and the allurements of pleasure, none that can so sustain him under labor, so carry him through difficulties, none that can so quicken him in the practice of every virtue, and animate him in the discharge of every duty.

But if prayer be so exhilarating to the soul, what shall be said of praise? Praise is the only employment, we had al-

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most said it is the only duty, in which self finds no part. In praise we go out of ourselves, and think only of him to whom we offer it. It is the most purely disinterested of all services. It is gratitude without solicitation, acknowledgment without petition. Prayer is the overflowing expression of our wants, praise of our affections. Prayer is the language of the destitute, praise of the redeemed sinner. If the angelic spirits offer their praises exempt from our mixture of infirmity or alloy, yet we have a motive for gratitude unknown even to the angels. They are unfallen beings; they cannot say as we can, "Worthy the Lamb, for he was slain for us." Prayer is prospective; praise takes in, in its wide range, enjoyment of present, remembrance of past, and anticipation of future blessings. Prayer points the only way to heaven, "praise is already there."

On Intercessory Prayer.

THE social affections were given us, not only for the kindliest, but the noblest purposes. The charities of father, son, and brother, were bestowed not only to make life pleasant, but to make it useful; not only that we might contribute to the present comfort, but to the eternal benefit of each other.

These heaven-implanted affections are never brought into exercise more properly, nor with more lively feelings, than in intercessory prayer. Our friends may have wants which we cannot remove, desires which we cannot gratify, afflictions which we cannot relieve, but it is always in our power to bring them before God; to pray for them whenever we pray for ourselves. This, as it is a most pleasant and easy, so it is an indispensable obligation. It is a duty which brings the social affections into their highest exercise, and which may be reciprocally paid and received.

The same Scriptures which expressly enjoin that supplication, prayers, intercession, and giving of thanks be made for all men, furnish also numerous examples of the efficacy of intercessory prayer. We need not dwell on the instance of the rain obtained by the prayers of Elijah, or the earlier availing intercession of Moses, with other public deliverances effected in the same manner.

Though the perseverance of Abraham's prayer did not prevent the extermination of the polluted city, yet doubtless the blessing he solicited for it returned unto his own bosom,

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and the successive promises made by the Almighty Judge to the successively reduced number of the righteous, for whose sake the petition for preservation was offered, afford a proof of the divine approbation, and a striking encouragement to persist in the duty of intercessory prayer. The promise of God was not withdrawn. The prayer was conditional, and could the petitioner have made up his very lowest complement, the city had been saved. The interceding heart in any event is sure to gain something for itself.

Prayer is such an enlarger of the affections, such an opener of the heart, that we cannot but wonder how any who live in the practice of it should be penurious in their alms; or, if they do give, should do it "grudgingly or of necessity." Surely if our prayer be cordial, we shall be more ready to assist as well as to love those for whom we are in the habit of making supplication to God. It is impossible to pray sincerely for the well-being of others, without being desirous of contributing to it. We can hardly conceive a more complete species of self-deception than that practised by an avaricious professor of religion—one who goes on mechanically to pray for the poor, whilst his prayer has neither opened his heart nor his purse. He may value himself on this, as on other instances of his ingenuity, in having found out so cheap a way of doing good, and go on contentedly, till he hear those tremendous words of exclusion, "Inasmuch as ye did it not to one of the least of these, ye did it not to me."

There is a generosity in religion. The same principle which disposes a Christian to contribute to the temporal interests of those he loves, inclines him to breathe his earnest supplication for their spiritual benefit. Not only does prayer for others promote natural affection, not only does it soften the heart of him who intercedes, but it is hoped that they for whom the intercession is made may reap the benefit.

But our intercessions must neither dwell in generalities for the public, nor in limitations to the wants of our particular friends.

The Christian is the friend of every description of the children of mortality. In the fullness of our compassion for the miseries of mankind, we pour out our hearts in prayer for the poor and destitute, and we do well. But there is another and a large class who are still more objects of our pity, and consequently should be of our prayer. We pray for those who have no portion in this world, but do we not sometimes forget to pray for those who have their whole portion

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in it? We pray for the praying servants of God, but perhaps we neglect to pray for those who never pray for themselves. These are the persons who stand most in need of the mercy of the Almighty, and of our Christian importunity in their favor.

Is it not affecting, that even into our devotions we are disposed to carry the regard we too highly indulge of the good things of this life, by earnestly imploring mercy upon those who want them; and by forgetting to offer our supplications in favor of those who are blinded by the too full enjoyment of them. If the one duty be done, should the other be left undone?

Happily we live in an age presenting many instances, where neither high station nor great riches impede piety, or obstruct devotion. Yet, it is to be feared that the general tendency of rank, and especially of riches, is to withdraw the heart from spiritual exercise, more than the hand from pecuniary bounty.

Let us then fervently include among the objects of our supplication that very pitiable and very necessitous class among the rich and great, if such a class there be, who live without any sensible feeling of the presence of God as acknowledged in prayer—for those persons who never entertain a doubt of their own deserts, even if they do not deny him who is the giver of the boundless blessings which lead them to forget him. Strange! that the very overflowing cup which ought to insure gratitude, should induce forgetfulness! Strange! that prayer to God should be neglected in proportion to the magnitude of his bounties!

May the writer be permitted to enrich the penury of her own meagre composition with a beautiful extract from one whose unequalled rhetoric was always warmed by a deep sensibility, and occasionally tinctured with religious feeling: the eloquent and almost prophetic author of Reflections on the Revolution in France:—

"The English people are satisfied, that to the great, the consolations of religion are as necessary as its instructions. They too are among the unhappy. They feel personal pain and domestic sorrow. In these they have no privilege, but are subject to pay their full contingent to the contributions levied on mortality. They want this sovereign balm under their gnawing cares and anxieties, which, being less conversant about the limited wants of animal life, range without limit, and are diversified by infinite combinations in the wild and unbounded regions of imagination. Some charita-

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ble dole is wanting to these our often very unhappy brethren, to fill the gloomy void that reigns in minds which have nothing on earth to hope or fear; something to relieve in the killing languor and overlabored lassitude of those who have nothing to do; something to excite an appetite to existence in the palled satiety which attends on all pleasures which may be bought, where nature is not left to her own process, where even desire is anticipated, and therefore fruition defeated by meditated schemes and contrivances of delight; and no interval, no obstacle, is interposed between the wish and the accomplishment."

O you great ones of the earth, whom riches ensnare and prosperity betrays! be largely liberal, even from self-interest. Not, indeed, expecting to make the liberality you bestow a remuneration for the devotions you withhold. Scatter your superfluities, and more than your superfluities, to the destitute, if not to vindicate Providence, yet to benefit yourselves. Not, indeed, to revive the old pious fraud of depending for salvation on the prayers of others; yet still you may hope to be repaid, with usurious interest, from the pious poor, by the very tender charity of their prayers for you. Their supplications may possibly be so heard, that you may at length be brought to the indispensable necessity and the bounden duty of praying for yourselves.

As to the commanding duty of praying for our enemies, the most powerful example bequeathed to us in Scripture, next to that of his divine Master on the cross, is that of St. Stephen. Even *after* the expiring martyr had ejaculated, "Lord Jesus, receive my spirit," he kneeled down and cried with a loud voice, "Lord, lay not this sin to their charge." Let every instance of Roman greatness of mind, let every story of Grecian magnanimity be ransacked, and produce, who can, such another example. Theirs is tumor, this is grandeur; theirs is heroism, this is Christianity; *they* died for their country, Jesus for his enemies; *they* implored the gods for themselves, Stephen for his murderers.

The Praying Christian in the World.—The Promise of Rest to the Christian.

As the keeping up a due sense of religion, both in faith and practice, so materially depends on the habit of fervent and heartfelt devotion, may we be permitted, in this place

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to insist on the probable effects which would follow the devout and conscientious exercise of prayer, rather than on prayer itself?

As soon as religion is really become the earnest desire of our hearts, it will inevitably become the great business of our lives; the one is the only satisfactory evidence of the other; consequently the religion of the heart and life will promote that prayer by which both have been promoted.

They, therefore, little advance the true interest of mankind, who, under the powerful plea of what great things God has done for us, in our redemption by his Son, neglect to encourage our active services in his cause. Hear the words of inspiration: "Be not slothful;" "run the race;" "fight the good fight;" "strive to enter in;" "give diligence;" "work out your own salvation;" "God is not unmindful to forget your labor of love;" "but when ye have done all, say ye are unprofitable servants, ye have done that which was your duty to do."

But if, after we have done all, we are unprofitable servants, what shall we be if we have done nothing? Is it not obvious that the Holy Spirit, who dictated these exhortations, clearly meant that a sound faith in the word of God was meant to produce holy exertion in his cause? The activity in doing good of the Son of God was not exceeded by his devotion, and both gloriously illustrated his doctrines and confirmed his divinity. Until we make, then, our religion a part of our common life, until we bring Christianity, as an illustrious genius is said to have brought philosophy, from its retreat to live in the world, and dwell among men; until we have brought it from the closet to the active scene, from the church to the world, whether that world be the court, the senate, the exchange, the public office, the private counting-house, the courts of justice, the professional departments, or the domestic drawing-room, it will not have fully accomplished what it was sent on earth to do.

We do not mean the introduction of its language, but of its spirit; the former is frequently as incompatible with public, as it is unsuitable to private business; but the latter is of universal application. We mean that the temper and dispositions which it is the object of prayer to communicate, should be kept alive in society, and brought into action in its affairs. That the integrity, the veracity, the justice, the purity, the liberality, the watchfulness over ourselves, the candor towards others, all exercised in the fear of the Lord, and strengthened by the word of God and prayer, should be

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brought from the retirement of devotion to the regulation of the conduct.

Though we have observed above, that it is rather the spirit than the language of religion that should be carried into business, yet we cannot forbear regretting that we seem to decline much from the sober usages of our ancestors. Formerly testamentary instruments were never made the mere conveyance of worldly possessions. They were also made the vehicles of pious sentiments, and always at least opened with a devout offering of the soul to him who gave it. Indeed, it is difficult to imagine how a man *can* write the words *my last will*, without a solemn reflection on that *last act* which must inevitably follow it, and in view of which act he is making it. May not this alteration in the practice be partly ascribed to the decline of habitual prayer ?*

But what fair opportunities have certain of the great officers of the law, especially in their *charges*, of giving to them a solemnity the most impressive, by adverting more frequently to the awful truths of Christianity! Even if such awakening appeals to the conscience should fail of their effects on the unhappy convicts to whom they are addressed, they may be of incalculable benefit to some of the numerous persons present. A counsel, a caution, a reproof, and exhortation, all on pure Christian principles, and thus coming from a profession to which it appears not immediately to belong, may especially, from not being expected, produce consequences the most salutary. The terribly affecting circumstances of the moment, the appalling scene so soon to follow, must give an unspeakable weight to the most touching admonition. He who is judging the condemned violator of divine and human laws, stands as a kind of representative

* I beg leave to strengthen my own sentiments on this head, by quoting a passage from an eminent and truly pious barrister, with an extract from the last will of one of the greatest men of our age:

"Of late years it has been the fashion (for there is a fashion even in the last act of a man's life) to omit these solemn preambles. I confess myself an approver of them, as believing it to be useful to the surviving relatives of the testator, to draw their attention to the tremendous consequences of the separation of soul and body, at seasons of impressibility and reflection." By the following extract from the will of the late Mr. Burke, it will be seen that his sentiments on this point coincided with those above expressed: "First, according to the ancient, good, and laudable custom, of which my heart and understanding recognise the propriety, I bequeath my soul to God, hoping for his mercy through the only merits of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. My body I desire, if I should die at any place very convenient for its transport thither, (but not otherwise,) to be buried at the church of Baconsfield, near to the bodies of my dearest brother and my dearest son, in all humility praying that, as we have lived in perfect unity together, we may together have part in the resurrection of the just." [Roberts on Wills, vol. ii. p. 378

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of the future Judge of quick and dead, and will himself soon be judged by him; a consideration which makes his responsibility peculiarly tremendous.*

But to return. Though we must not, in accommodation to the prevailing prejudices and unnecessary zeal against abstinence and devotion, neglect the imperative duties of retirement, prayer, and meditation; yet, perhaps, as prayer makes so indispensable an article in the Christian life, some retired, contemplative persons may apprehend that it makes the whole; whereas prayer is only the operation which sets the machine going. It is the sharpest spur to virtuous action, but not the act itself. The only infallible incentive to a useful life, but not a substitute for that usefulness. Religion keeps her children in full employment. It finds them work for every day in the week, as well as on Sundays.

The praying Christian, on going into the world, feels that his social and religious duties are happily comprised in one brief sentence—"I will *think* upon the commandments to do them." What the Holy Spirit has so indissolubly joined, he does not separate.

He whose heart has been set in motion in the morning by prayer, who has had his spiritual pulse quickened by a serious perusal of the Holy Scriptures, will find his work growing upon him in regular proportion to his willingness to do it. He is diligently exact in the immediate duties of the passing day. Though procrastination is treated by many as a light evil, he studiously avoids it, because he has felt its mischiefs; he is active even from the love of ease, for he knows that the duties which would have cost him little, if done on the day they were due, may, by the accumulation of many neglected days, cost him much. The fear of this rouses him to immediate exertion. If the case in question be doubtful, he deliberates, he inquires, he prays; if it be clear and pressing, what his hand finds to do he does with all his might, and in the calls of distress he always acts on his favorite aphorism, that giving soon is giving twice.

Abroad how many duties meet him! He has on his hands the poor that want bread, the afflicted who want comfort, the distressed who want counsel, the ignorant who want teaching, the depressed who want soothing. At home he has his family to watch over. He has to give instruction to his children, and an example to his servants. But his more imme-

* The late lord Kenyon was neither afraid nor ashamed to introduce both the doctrine and language of Christianity on these occasions; and we have lately seen other valuable instances of the adoption of this practice.

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diate, as well as more difficult, work is with himself, and he knows that this exercise, well performed, can alone enable him wisely to perform the rest. Here he finds work for every faculty of his understanding, every conquest over his will, for every affection of his heart. Here his spirit truly labors. He has to watch, as well as to pray, that his conscience be not darkened by prejudice; that his bad qualities do not assume the shape of virtues, nor his good ones engender self-applause; that his best intentions do not mislead his judgment; that his candor do not degenerate into indifference, nor his strictness into bigotry; that his moderation do not freeze, nor his zeal burn. He has to control his impatience at the defeat of his most wisely conceived plans. He will find, that in his best services there is something that is wrong, much that is wanting; and he feels that whatever in them is right is not his own, but the gift of God.

He finds that his obedience is incomplete, that his warmest affections are languid, perhaps his best intentions not realized, his best resolves not followed up. In this view, though he is abased in dust and ashes in looking up to God as the fountain of perfection, he is cheered in looking up to him also as the fountain of mercy in Christ Jesus. He prays, as well as strives, that the knowledge of his own faults may make him more humble, and his sense of the divine mercies more grateful.

He will find that his faith, even though it does not want sincerity, will too frequently want energy. He has, therefore, to watch against cold and heartless prayer; though, perhaps, the humility arising from this consciousness is a benefit in another way. He feels it difficult to bring every "thought into captivity to the obedience of Christ," yet he goes on cheerily, willing to believe that what may be difficult is not impossible. He has to struggle against over-anxiety for temporal things. He has to preserve simplicity of intention, consistency, and perseverance. He has, in short, to watch against a long list of sins, errors, and temptations, which he will find heavier in weight, and more in number, the more closely he looks into his catalogue.

The praying Christian in the world has, above all, to watch against the fear of men, as he may find it more easy to endure the cross than to despise the shame. Even if he have in a good degree conquered his temptation, he may still find a more dangerous enemy in the applause of the world than he found in its enmity. He has observed, that many amiable and even pious persons who are got above the more

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vulgar allurements of the world, who have surmounted all the temptations of a more sensual kind, who are no longer subdued by its softening luxuries, its seducing pleasures, its dazzling splendors, nor its captivating amusements, have not yet quite escaped this danger. The keen desire of its good opinion, the anxiety for its applause, ensnares many who are got above any thing else which the world has to offer. This is, perhaps, the last lingering sin which cleaves even to those who have made a considerable progress in religion, the still unextinguished passion of a mind great enough to have subdued many other passions.

The danger of the Christian in the world is *from* the world. He is afraid of the sleek, smooth, insinuating, and not discreditable vices; he guards against self-complacency. If his affairs prosper, and his reputation stands high, he betakes himself to his only sure refuge, humble prayer. He knows it is more easy to perform a hundred right deeds, and to keep many virtues in exercise, than "to keep himself unspotted from the world," than to hold the things of the world with a loose hand. Even his best actions, which may bring him most credit, have their dangers; they make him fear that "while he has a name to live, he is dead."

Though much above feeling any joy in vulgar acclamation, he is not insensible to the praise of those who are praised by others; but though not indifferent to the good opinion of good men, the praise even of the best is not his object: he knows that to obtain it is not the end for which he was sent into the world. His ambition is of a higher order, it has a loftier aim. The praise of man cannot satisfy a spirit which feels itself made for immortality.

He feels that if he had no sin but vanity, the consciousness of that alone would be sufficient to set him on his guard, to quicken him in prayer, to caution him in conduct. He does not fear vanity as he fears any other individual vice, as a single enemy against which he is to be on the watch, but as that vice which, if indulged, would poison all his virtues. Among the sins of the inner man, he knows that "this kind goeth not out but by prayer." When he hears it said of any popular, and especially of any religious, character, "he is a good man, but he is vain," he says within himself, he is vain, and therefore I fear he is not a good man. How many right qualities does vanity rob of their value, how many right actions of their reward!

Every suspicion of the first stirring of vanity in himself sends him with deeper prostration before his Maker. Lord,

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what is man! shall the praise of a fellow-creature, whose breath is in his nostrils, whose ashes must soon be mingled with my own, which may even before my own be consigned to kindred dust, shall *his* praise be of sufficient potency to endanger the humility of a being, who is not only looking forward to the applause of those glorious spirits which surround the throne of God, but to the approbation of God himself?

When those with whom he occasionally mixes see the praying Christian calm and cheerful in the world, they little suspect the frequent struggles, the secret conflicts he has within. Others see his devout and conscientious life, but he alone knows the plague of his own heart. For this plague he seeks the only remedy; to prayer, that balm of hurt minds, he constantly repairs.

The praying Christian endeavors to make even what to some might seem casual expression in Scripture, matter of improvement. He is not contented to devote to the distressed his mere superfluities, he makes requisitions on his frugality to add to his contributions, and he learns this lesson from the highest model.

He observes that he who could feed thousands by a word of his mouth, yet took care not to let the miracle pass without grafting on it a moral maxim for general use, a religious duty for general practice. He who could have multiplied to any extent the twelve baskets, as he had done the five loaves, condescended to say, "gather up the fragments that remain, that nothing be lost;" and that he might set an example of prayer in every possible form, he had previously *blessed* the simple but abundant meal, presenting, in this single instance, an union of three great qualities—generosity, economy, and devotion.

The practical Christian observes, with grateful admiration, how Scripture has, as it were, let down to the plainest apprehension the habitual duty of constantly looking to God, by a familiar allusion taken from domestic life. The fidelity, the diligent attention, the watchful observance of "the eyes of a servant looking to the hand of his master, and the eyes of a maiden to the hand of her mistress," is a simple illustration of the Christian's duty, equally intelligible to him who serves, and obligatory on him who is served.

To a worldly man, his own sin appears less than it is; to a good man, greater; not that he sees through a false medium; or aggravates the truth, or forgets the apostle's direction to think soberly; but while the nominal Christian weighs his offences in the scales of the world, the praying Christian

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brings him to the balance of the sanctuary. The former judges of sin only as he sees it in others; and the worst men in the rank above the vulgar do not always appear so bad as they are. In his own heart he sees little, because with that heart he is not acquainted. Whereas his own bosom is the very place where the good man looks for sin, and his perceptions of what is wrong are so delicate, that he sees it in its first seed: in short, the one thinks himself worse than others, because he knows himself well; the other thinks himself better, because he knows himself not at all.

When we consider the conflicts and the trials of the conscientious, watchful, praying Christian, we shall estimate aright the value of the consoling promise of that eternal rest from his labors, which supports him under them. And though *rest* is one of the lowest descriptions of the promised bliss of heaven, yet it holds out a cheering prospect of relief and satisfaction to a feeling being, who is conscious of the fallen condition of his mortal nature in all its weakness and imperfection. *Rest*, therefore, is of itself a promise sufficiently inviting to make him desire to depart and to be with Christ, even independently of his higher hope. The joy unspeakable, the crown of glory, and all those other splendid images of the blessedness of heaven, exalt and delight his mind. But it is, though with a higher, yet with a more indefinite delight. He adores without fully comprehending the mighty blessing. But the promise of rest is more intelligible to the heavy-laden Christian; he better understands it, because it is so exactly applicable to his present want and feelings:—*this* is not our rest. It offers the relief longed for by a weary, frail, and feverish being. He who best knew what man wanted, promised to his disciples *peace and rest;* and his divine Spirit has represented the state of heaven under this image more frequently than any other, as being in more direct contrast to its present state—a state of care, anxiety, and trouble, and a state of sin, the cause of all his other troubles. Perhaps this less elevated view of heaven may occur more rarely to persons of high-wrought feelings in religion, yet to the Christian of a contrary character it is a never-failing consolation, a homefelt solace, the object of his fervent prayer. What a support to be persuaded that "the work of righteousness is peace, and the effect of righteousness is quietness and assurance forever!"

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The Lord's Prayer, a model both for our devotion and our practice.—It teaches the duty of promoting schemes to advance the glory of God.

It is not customary for kings to draw up petitions for their subjects to present to themselves; much less do earthly monarchs consider the act of petitioning worthy of reward, nor do they number the petitions so much among the services done them, as among the burthens imposed on them. Whereas it is a singular benefit to our fallen race that the King of kings both dictates our petitions, and has promised to recompense us for making them.

In the Lord's prayer may be found the seminal principle of all the petitions of a Christian, both for spiritual and temporal things; and however in the fulness of his heart he will necessarily depart from his model in his choice of expressions; into whatever lamina he may expand the pure gold of which it is composed, yet he will still find the general principle of his own more enlarged application to God substantially contained in this brief but finished compendium.

Is it not a striking proof of the divine condescension, that knowing our propensity to err, our blessed Lord should himself have dictated our petitions, partly perhaps as a corrective of existing superstitions, but certainly to leave behind him a *regulator* by which all future ages should *set* their devotions? and we might perhaps establish it as a safe rule for prayer in general, that any petition which cannot, in some shape, be accommodated to the spirit of some part of the Lord's prayer, may not be right to be adopted. Here temporal things are kept in their due subordination; they are asked for in great moderation, as an acknowledgment of our dependence on the Giver. The request for the divine intercession we must of course offer for ourselves, as the Intercessor had not yet assumed his mediatorial office.

There is in this prayer a concatenation of the several clauses, what in human composition the critics call concealed method. The petitions rise out of each other. Every part also is, as it were, fenced round, the whole meeting in a circle; for the desire that God's name may be hallowed, his will be done, and his kingdom come, is referred to, and confirmed by the ascription at the close. If the kingdom, the power, and the glory, are his, then his ability to do and to give are declared to be infinite.

But, as we have already observed, if we do not make our

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prayer the ground of our practice, if we do not pray as we believe, and act as we pray, we must not wonder if our petitions are not heard, and consequently not answered.

In the tremendous scene in the Apocalyptic vision, where the dead, small and great, stand before God, and the books were opened, and another book was opened, the dead were judged out of those things which were written in the books; were judged according—not to their prayers, but "their works." Surely then Christianity is a practical religion, and in order to use aright the prayer our Lord has given us, we must model our life by it as well as our petitions.

If we pray that the name of God may be hallowed, yet neglect to hallow it ourselves, by family as well as personal devotion, and a conscientious attendance on all the ordinances of public worship, we defeat the end of our praying, by falling short of its obligation.

The practical discrepancies between our prayers and our practice do not end here. How frequently are we solemnly imploring of God that "his kingdom may come," while we are doing nothing to promote his kingdom of grace here, and consequently his kingdom of glory hereafter.

If we pray that God would "give his Son the heathen for his inheritance," and yet make it a matter of indifference whether a vast proportion of the globe should live heathens or die Christians; if we pray that "the knowledge of the Lord may cover the earth, as the waters cover the sea," yet act as if we were indifferent whether Christianity ended as well as began at home; if we pray that "the sound may go out into all lands, and their words unto the ends of the world," and yet are satisfied to keep the sound within our own hearing, and the words within our own island, is not this a prayer which goeth out of feigned lips?

When we pray that "his will may be done," we know that his will is, that "all should be saved, that not one should perish." When, therefore, we assist in sending the gospel to the dark and distant corners of the earth, then, and not till then, may we constantly desire of God in our prayers, that "his saving health may be known to all nations."

For we must vindicate the veracity of our prayer by our exertions, and extend its efficiency by our influence: if we contribute not to the accomplishment of the object for which we pray, what is this but mocking Omniscience, not by unmeaning, but unmeant petitions? If we do nothing we are inconsistent; but if we do worse than nothing, if we oppose, and by our opposition hinder the good which we do not think

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proper to support, may we not possibly bring on ourselves the appalling charge of being "found fighting against God!"

It is indeed an easier and a cheaper way, to quiet the conscience by that common anodyne, "that the heathen are very well as they are, that the morals of the Hindoos are not inferior to those of Christians." With what sort of Christians these assertors of the rival innocence of idolaters associate, we will not pretend to determine.

But, allowing that we do not always send abroad the very best samples of Christianity, the very best representatives of its practical effects, allowing also that too many who remain at home, and who profess and call themselves Christians, are guilty of crimes which disgrace human nature, yet Christianity renounces them. Christian governments inflict on them capital punishments. While among these poor idolaters all these social duties are trampled on, all the suggestions of natural conscience are stifled, rites the most obscene, sacrifices the most bloody are offered; and these crimes are not only committed, but sanctioned, but enjoined; they do not violate religion, they make a part of it. Surely then, politically connected with them as we are, and yet contentedly to leave them in their degraded state of morals, without any attempt for their improvement, do we not by this neglect virtually pronounce and awfully anticipate their dreadful sentence, "let him that is unjust be unjust still, and he that is filthy, let him be filthy still?"

Again, it is an easier and a cheaper way to throw the weight off our own shoulders by the cool remark, that "these things belong not to us, human efforts are superfluous; God must bring them about by a miracle." God, it is true, introduced Christianity by miracles, but he established it by means. Miracles, indeed, are his prerogative, but man is his instrument. Had he not sent his gospel and his ministers, it is probable that the strangers scattered throughout Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Bythinia, and all proconsular Asia, had never heard of Christianity to this day, which is, indeed, still the case of too many parts of that region.

But is it not equally the effect of divine grace, I had almost said, is it not equally a miracle, when, in the hottest season of the most unrelenting warfare, in the most calamitous period of unusual scarcity, when Britain had the whole civilized world in arms against her, so that she could emphatically say, "there is none that fighteth for us but only thou, O God;" when it might seem business enough for any but Christians to take care of themselves, even then Britain

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raised the banner of the cross, not in the most unprofitable crusade for the most fruitless object, but that she might carry the knowledge of Him who suffered on it to the ends of the habitable globe? Not to redeem his sepulchre from infidels, but to communicate to them the tidings of his resurrection, and of redemption through his blood. Is it not the effect of grace, and still more nearly approaching to a miracle, when, in a period immediately subsequent, while their fields were yet red with slaughter, and their rivers ran blood, their cities plundered, and their kingdoms desolated, God disposed the hearts of hostile sovereigns, ruling over opposing nations and the tenacious professors of different religions, yet, as if actuated by one universal feeling, simultaneously to rise up in one common cause for the accomplishment of this mighty object—when the first use they made of the termination of war was to disseminate the gospel of peace; the first tribute they paid to the glory of God was to publish abroad that grand instrument of good will to men! Let us not then indulge groundless imaginations, as if miracles were wrought to justify indolence! as if a man were to be excused the trouble of being the active agent of divine Providence.

The miracles wrought at Ephesus seem rather to have been intended as a confirmation of the truth of St. Paul's doctrine, than as the actual instrument of conversion. Many rejected the gospel who saw the miracles. The miracles wrought did not supersede the necessity of the apostle's "speaking boldly for the space of three months, disputing and persuading the things concerning the kingdom of God." They did not supersede the necessity, at another time, of his continuing to preach among them, for the space of two years, the two great doctrines of his mission, "repentance towards God, and faith in our Lord Jesus Christ." Nor did they prevent his thinking it his bounden duty to send to the Ephesians his exquisite epistle, for the furtherance of their faith in the gospel. Here we behold the union of the Bible and the missionary—of the gospel sent and the gospel preached.

"Many," says the sagacious bishop Butler, "think there is but one evil, and that evil is superstition; and we know that the epithets of superstitious and enthusiastic have been unsparingly lavished on the most sober and well digested plans for the dispersion of the Scriptures abroad. We know that very trifling errors, errors inseparable from all great undertakings, every petty indiscretion, the inevitable consequence of employing a number of inferior agents, have been carefully collected, minutely set down in the note book of observation,

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and triumphantly produced as unanswerable objections to the whole plan." "But," says the profound prelate above named, in his very able defence of missions, preached before the venerable Society for propagating the Gospel in Foreign Parts,* "many well-disposed persons want much to be admonished what a dangerous thing it is to discountenance what is good because it is not better, by raising objections to some underparts of it."

The truth is, *they* are neither enthusiasts nor superstitious, who believe that well-concerted and prudently conducted societies for the promotion of this great object, acting with a deep sense of human imperfection, and in dependence upon the favor of God, will, in due time, with his blessing, without which nothing is strong, nothing is holy, accomplish the great end of bringing all the kingdoms of the world to become the kingdoms of the Redeemer. But *he* is the superstitious, he is the enthusiast, who indulges unfounded expectations, who looks for the fulfilment of declarations which have never been made, who depends upon miracles which have never been announced, who looks for consequences without their predisposing causes, who believes that the unassisted heathen, sunk in intellectual and spiritual darkness, shall call on Him of whom they have not heard, or that they shall hear without a preacher, or that the preacher will be found without being sent.

We might just as reasonably expect to see the beautiful imagery of oriental metaphor, as displayed in the highly figurative language of the prophets, actually realized. We might as reasonably expect that the rose of Sharon shall literally blossom in the wilderness of Arabia, or the cedars of Lebanon spring up in the sandy valleys of Africa; that the thirsty desert should produce spontaneous springs of water; that the tame and savage animals should live together in friendly compact; that the material hills shall really sink and the valleys rise of themselves; we might, I say, as rationally hope to see these lively illustrations of the fulfilment of the divine promises literally verified, as to expect Christianity to make its own unassisted way into the distant and desolate corners of the earth. God has committed Christianity into the hands of Christians for universal diffusion.

Let it be observed, that it appears to be no real departure from the subject with which this chapter opened, that reference is not more frequently made in its progress to prayer.

* Preached at their anniversary meeting, February 16th, 1738–9.

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This seems to be the less necessary, as we are not reasoning with the irreligious man, but with the Christian, with him who professes to use the Lord's prayer as the pattern of his own devotions; and from the premises of that prayer these observations are not forced interpretations, but natural deductions.

The Almighty is consistent in all his operations. They always exhibit simplicity and economy. He never works a superfluous miracle. There is also analogy in his works. Christ wrought miracles to relieve the bodily wants of the poor; he works miracles for them no longer, he turns them over to the rich. He wrought miracles on the first conversion of the heathen; he works miracles for them no longer, he now turns them over to Christians. He resigns to human agency, under his blessing, to provide for the spiritual wants of the ignorant, as well as for the temporal wants of the indigent. Christianity and riches are deposited in the hands of Christians, for the more general dispersion of both to the respectively destitute.

And when, if ever, through the unmerited mercy of God, that glorious and devoutly desired day shall arrive, which warms the heart even in the distant perspective of prophecy, when nation shall no more rise against nation, and they shall learn war no more; what is so likely to hasten that triumphant period, what is so likely to turn the sword into a pruning-hook, and to establish lasting peace throughout the world, as that spirit of love and concord which the universal diffusion of gospel light is calculated to impart? What is so likely to produce charity among all the children of the same common Father, as when subjects as well as sovereigns shall be brought to know God, from the greatest to the least.

Those admirable institutions, whose object it is to lead to this blessed consummation, have already enlarged the borders of Christian charity to an almost indefinite extent, by bringing into contact from every point of the compass, and from almost every city in the civilized world, Christians who had not so much as heard of each other's existence; it has already shown them that whatever difference of education and of government, whatever modifications of opinion had hitherto divided them, the great fundamental principles of love to God, of faith in his Son, and charity to the souls of men, are at length beginning to draw them into a nearer connection. These general principles of agreement are already bringing into one point of union persons whom difference of sentiment had kept asunder as widely as seas had separated, and are

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the only means, as far as human penetration can foresee, of drawing the cords of amity into still closer bonds.

Already, even in the early stage of this vast enterprise, may we not perceive that it has had a considerable share in promoting mutual good will, reciprocal kindness, and growing confidence, and this with foreigners, who, though they had subdued their enmity, might not so soon have conquered their jealousy? Has it not a powerful tendency to cure any remaining distrust, to confirm good faith, to promote confidence and attachment between nations, whose respect was not, perhaps, altogether untinctured with suspicion? May it not break down the wall of partition which has so long kept us asunder? May it not bring those who were aforetime separated in heart as well as country, to unite in Christian brotherhood, till we become at length of one mind in doctrine, as we already are in regard to this institution. May not the probable results of this Christian confederacy become a ratification between monarchs, firmer than any political compact, stronger than any diplomatic convention? For is it not an instrument of confederation of which the GREAT SEAL IS THE WORD OF GOD? Does it not embrace the two sublime objects of the song of the angelic hosts, by uniting "glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace and good-will towards men?" For what means, we repeat, are so likely to bring churches, who have been hitherto kept in spiritual darkness, to a gradual and devoutly desired reformation, as to disperse that darkness, as our being the honored instruments of causing the full beams of divine truth to shine more directly upon them?

To descend to the very minutest wheels of this mighty engine: with whatever derision that which has been denominated popular charity may have been treated, its inferior divisions have this advantage, that they set in motion the young and the poor. To the young female of fortune this subordinate part of the great whole furnishes a kind of novitiate to her future and more extended sphere of charity, for the details of which this sex has the most leisure. To the poor, like the admirable institutions of the Savings bank, though for different purposes, it gives them a little and a safe lift in the scale of society. For will they not be less likely to follow in the turbulent train of the seditious demagogue, less disposed by his pernicious but persuasive outcry to give their stated penny for the promotion of riot and the maintenance of rioters, when that penny has been pre-engaged for the circulation of that volume, which forbids them to speak evil of dignities, which commands to avoid those who are given to

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change; to work, to be quiet, to mind their own business; which imperatively says, "I exhort that prayers and intercessions be made for kings and all in authority;" and above all, will not the Bible be the surest antidote against the infection of the poison contained in that profusion of books, pamphlets, and placards, which, without such a specific, threatens both our moral and political destruction.

It is the nature of man to delight in party, he delights to belong to something, to hold to his fellow-creatures, though by the least and lowest link in the chain of society; let us then take advantage of this his natural weakness. For is it not better to attach him to something that is useful to himself and to others, that he may be less likely to be drawn into such schemes as are destructive of his temporal, as well as his own highest interests, and dangerous to the security of the state, and of the country. To be connected, though by the lowest and slightest tie, with his superiors, is to the poor man at once an encouragement and a security. To belong to societies of which princes are the patrons, is at once a gratification and a guard; for will not this connection, remote as it may seem, confirm his abhorrence of those revolutionary societies whose aim is the overthrow of princes?

Let us not then grudge to the poor, who have so few pleasures, that pure, and to them that hitherto untasted pleasure, that almost sacred feeling, how much more blessed is it to give than to receive. Let us not deny them the gratification of being humble contributors towards conveying that word of life to others, by which their own souls have been benefited; and to which they are indebted for the knowledge, that it is the duty of Christians to teach others what themselves have been gratuitously taught.

It is, however, most important to recommend that the petty contributions of the poor should never be extorted, nor even wrung from them by undue influence. It must be a willing offering, not pinched from their necessities, but cheerfully accepted, as the thankful tribute of successful industry. With respect to such as are in distress, and especially in debt, it would neither be honest in themselves to give, nor in the collector to receive. A very few indiscretions of this kind have given too inviting a handle, which has been unfairly laid hold of to bring the plan itself into discredit.

To venture one more passage from the prelate already quoted—and who will accuse bishop Butler of enthusiasm?—"If the gospel had its proper influence in the Christian world in general, as this country is the centre of trade, and the seat

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of learning, a very few years, in all probability, would settle Christianity in every country in the world *without miraculous assistance.*"

If we, then, in this highly favored land, are blessed with the volume of divine Revelation, let us impart it to others with the greater alacrity, from the humiliating recollection that it was no merit of our own which brought the news of eternal life to an island of barbarians and idolaters. Freely we have received, freely let us give.

The sun of righteousness which first arose in the east, rejoicing as a giant to run his course, has travelled in the greatness of his strength, till, having made the circuit of the globe, having illuminated the western world, he is once again rising to shed the glories of his orient beams where they first dawned.

> "So sinks the day-star in the ocean-bed,
> And yet again repairs his drooping head,
> And tricks his beams, and with new-spangled ore
> Flames in the forehead of the morning sky."

Let Commerce, then, wherever she spreads her sails, be assured that whether she carries the wealth of Ormus or of Ind, barbaric pearl and gold from the East, or from the West, the mines of Potosi or Peru, the most precious merchandise with which her vessels can be freighted, is that pearl of great price which the merchantman in the gospel sold all that he had to purchase.

Let Discovery, wherever she pushes her bold and perilous adventure, wherever she lights on an inhabited nook of land, even should she succeed in exploring the secrets of the polar world, let her be assured that all the wonders for which gaping curiosity impatiently waits, are not to be compared with the wonders contained in that gospel, which, it is to be hoped, she will make part of her provision for the voyage. Let her be assured, that if she carries the Bible, she will, at return, bring back no news of equal value with that she carries out; will bring back to her native home no tidings of equal joy to the glad tidings of the gospel she has carried abroad.

Let Conquest, though her garments have been rolled in blood, make the vanquished the only reparation in her power, not merely, like the conquering Cæsar and Alexander, by carrying civilization in her train, but Christianity; by carrying them this charter of our own immortal hopes. If this mighty boon will not fully expiate the offences of the injurer, it will more than mitigate, it will even more than repay the wrongs of the injured.

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Conclusion.

"I WILL be sanctified in them that draw nigh unto me," says the Almighty by his prophet. We must, therefore, when we approach him in our devotions, frequently endeavor to warm our hearts, raise our views, and quicken our aspirations with a recollection of his glorious attributes,—of that omnipotence which can give to all without the least deduction from any, or from himself; of that ubiquity which renders him the constant witness of our actions; of that omniscience which makes him a discerner of our intentions, and which penetrates the most secret disguises of our inmost souls; of that perfect holiness, which should at once be the object of our adoration, and the model of our practice; of that truth, which will never forfeit any of his promises; of that faithfulness, which will never forsake any that trust in him; of that love, which our innumerable offences cannot exhaust; of that eternity which had place "before the mountains were brought forth, from everlasting to everlasting he is God;" of that grandeur which has set his glory above the heavens; of that long-suffering of God, who is strong and patient, and who is provoked every day; of that justice which will by no means clear the guilty, yet of that mercy which forgiveth iniquity, transgression and sin; of that compassion which waits to be gracious; of that goodness which leadeth to repentance; of that purity, which, while it hates sin, invites the sinner to return.

All these attributes are his in the abstract. He is not only strong, but our strength, not only the giver of life, but life itself, he not only bestows, but *is* salvation, he not only teaches truth, but *is* truth, he not only shows the way to heaven, but *is* the way, not only communicates light, but *is* light.

When we reflect that even his incommunicable attributes are employed in never-ceasing exercise for the common benefit and happiness of mankind, adoration is melted into gratitude. When we consider that even his justice, that flaming sword which threatened our eternal exclusion from paradise, the attribute at which the best may tremble, for who is he that lives and sins not, is turned in our favor by the great propitiation made for sin; that heart must be hard, indeed, which is not softened into love. It is because we are so little accustomed to indulge these reflections, that our natural hardness acquires additional obduracy.

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Whatever good there is even in the renewed man, is but a faint adumbration of the perfections of God. The best created things, light itself, lose all their brightness when compared with the uncreated glory from which all they have is borrowed. The heavens are not pure in his sight, behold the moon and it shineth not. He chargeth his angels with folly. The sublimest intellectual intelligences, and the brightest visible operations of his power, are swallowed up in the contemplation of his underived original perfection. The foolishness of God is wiser than the wisdom of man, and the weakness of God is stronger than the strength of man.

Yet though the highest conceivable created excellence is thrown into utter darkness, in the comparison with this surpassing splendor, yet these remote resemblances serve to convey some idea, but oh how weak! some reminding, but oh how inadequate! some conception, but oh how faint! of the divine perfections.

Hence in the highest qualities of the best Christian we have a hint, a rudiment which serves to recall to our mind the divine excellence, of which they are an emanation. We use it, not as a means of overvaluing the creature, but of raising our adoration of the infinite, inexhaustible, overflowing fountain of natural, intellectual, and spiritual good. Thus, though we cannot "search out the Almighty to perfection;" yet these faint traces are constant intimations to us to imitate, in our low measure and degree, all the imitable attributes of Almighty goodness. He would never have said, "be ye holy as I am holy," if holiness had been absolutely unattainable. There must be an aim, however low, at this conformity to our divine pattern.

The life which the Lord of glory condescended to lead on earth, has introduced us to the nearest possible view of the divine perfections, and exhibited a clearer prospect of the possibility of a closer imitation of them, than could have been conveyed to us by any other means. His actions are not merely objects of human admiration. They all, with the exception of his miracles, imperatively demand to be imitated, as well as admired. His meekness under reproaches the most contumelious; his patience under sufferings the most exquisite; his combination of active beneficence with unremitting devotion,—for, after days spent in successive acts of charity, he continued all night in prayer to God; his union of constant self-denial with unwearied bounty; his enduring hunger, who could have relieved it by one of those miracles so often performed for the relief of others; his

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compassion for sinners joined with his hatred of sin; his supplication for his enemies, extenuating their guilt by pleading their ignorance: "Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do!"

If this religion be not practical, if this practice be not a a pattern for ours, we know not what is. While we obey him then in praying for our fellow-creatures, let us remember that we must imitate his divine philanthropy in assisting them; while we rank ourselves among his admirers by praising his excellences, let us remember we shall only be known to be his disciples when we love one another.

If good works then be indispensable, and faith be their great influencing principle, both must be kept alive and kept in exercise by the aliment of prayer. Prayer is the chain of communication with God himself: the readiest way to be assimilated to his likeness, the best means of promoting our conformity to his will, of advancing our love to him and to each other. If we neglect prayer, we rob our souls of the prescribed means of our serving him here, and of the fairest foretaste of that communion with him, which will be our highest happiness hereafter.

The obedience of the heart which grows out of a sound faith, rooted good desires, well-weighed resolutions of fidelity, formed in a higher strength than our own; a belief in the sacred Scriptures so confirmed as not to be shaken by any objections brought against them, by any difficulties to be found in them; the comparing faithfully all we have heard urged against religion with all we have seen of its effects, and experienced of its benefits,—all this is the solid ground on which future attainments must hereafter be built, a ground to be tried by prayer in the inquiring mind and the seeking heart.

And when our reason is become as strong on the side of Christianity as our belief—when our faith is as enlightened as it is implicit—when the growth of the one only confirms the dominion of the other, this is such an obedience of the heart as will infallibly produce obedience in the life; an obedience which will be both the cause and the consequence of effectual prayer.

The renewing of the soul after the image of God is not otherwise to be obtained than by true, spiritual, heart-searching prayer. There may be a form of unfelt petitions, a ceremonious avowal of faith, a customary profession of repentance, a general acknowledgment of sin, uttered from the lips to God; but where is his image and superscription written upon

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the heart? Where is the transforming power of religion in the life? Where is the living transcript of the divine original? Where is that holiness to which the vision of the Lord is specifically promised? Where is the light, and life, and grace of the Redeemer exhibited in the temper and conduct? Yet we are assured, that if we are Christians, there must be an aim at this conformity.

As for the genuine Christian, however weak in faith and defective in obedience, yet he is still seeking, though with slow and faltering steps, the things which are above; he is still striving, though with unequal progress, for the prize of his high calling; he is still looking, though with a dim and feeble eye, for glory, honor, and immortality; he is still waiting, though not with a trust so lively as to annihilate the distance, to see his eternal redemption drawing nigh. Though his aims will always be far greater than his attainments, yet he is not discouraged; his hope is above, his heart is above, his treasure is above; no wonder then that his prayers are directed, and a large portion of his wealth sent forward thither, where he himself hopes soon to be. It is but transmitting his riches of both kinds, not only to his future, but his eternal home.

Even if prayer were as worthless, with respect to present advantages, and religion as burthensome as some suppose, it would be a sufficient vindication of both that they lead to eternal bliss. When, by a distant journey, we have been long separated from our own beloved habitation, we do not call that the most desirable road back to it which abounds with the gayest objects, but that which will bring us the most safely home. If, indeed, we can amuse ourselves with the scenery, without slackening our pace, or diverging from our path, it is well. It is no offence against the law of love, if we catch in passing such innocent and safe delights as his bounty has scattered in our path. And if our journey have so many refreshments showered down by the hand of divine beneficence, what shall be the delights of our home?

If the heavens grow black with clouds, and storms arise, these only serve to quicken our pace, and make us avoid digression. If sickness or accident befal us, our heart is still cheered with the thought that we are nearer home—the future supports us under the present; a little further, say we, a little more fatigue, and we shall see the desire of our heart. If we are bent on security rather than amusement, the straightest and the safest way will determine our choice. Heaven is worth more sacrifices of pleasure and of profit than

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those to which a religious life may subject us; though, after all, it often calls for fewer and lighter than a worldly one imposes. But if it were as rough and thorny as those who have never tried it believe, it would be a sufficient apology for voluntarily encountering its hardships, that it is the only road to heaven.

When the prosperous fool says, "soul, take thine ease, thou hast much goods laid up for thee," the prosperous Christian says, "soul, tremble at thine ease—be on thy guard. Thou hast, indeed, much goods laid up for thee, but it is in a future world. Lose not a large inheritance for a paltry possession: forfeit not an unalienable reversion for a life interest,—a life which this very night may be required of thee."

Perhaps even the worldly and thoughtless man, under an occasional fit of dejection, or an accidental disappointment, may be brought to say, "When I am in heaviness, I will think upon God." Oh, think upon him now, now, when you are in prosperity, now, when your fortunes are flourishing, now, when your hill is so strong that you think it shall never be moved; think upon him when the scene is the brightest, when the world courts, flatteries mislead, and pleasures betray you; think on him while you are able to think at all, while you possess the capacity of thinking. The time may come when "he may turn his face from you, and you will be troubled." Think of God when the alluring images of pleasure and of profit would seduce you from him. Prosperity is the season of peculiar peril. "It is the bright day that bring forth the adder." Think of God when a tempting world says, "All this will I give thee." Trust not the insolvent world, it has cheated every creditor that ever trusted it. It will cheat you.

To those who are yet halting between two opinions, or rather between an opinion and an inclination, to those who approve the right, but pursue the wrong, those who are not without convictions, but which convictions pleasure stifles, or business overrules, those who are balancing between the world and him who made it, who resolve to reform, but make the resolution a substitute for the performance,—and oh how large, and in many points how respectable a class this is!—to these, to the doubting, and the dilatory, we would take the liberty to speak plainly.

It is much to be feared, that secret, unconscious infidelity lies at the bottom of the little progress you make in your spiritual attainments. If the truth, certainty, and incon-

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ceivable importance of eternal things were once rooted and grounded in the heart, it would infallibly quicken both devotion and practice. We know, but we do not act upon the knowledge, that our great business in this world is to determine our choice for eternity. This is not a bye work, which may be deferred to any time at the hazard of its not being done at all; it is the imperious business of the present hour, the next may not be granted us. It is not an affair to be kept in reserve, an affair to be postponed till other affairs are settled, for how many souls has this dilatory delusion ruined!

The resolution you may make at this moment, and the practical effect of this resolution, may determine your fate forever. The decision, if delayed, may never be made; the call, now given, may never be repeated. Think what you put to hazard by delay. There is not an hour in our lives on which eternal life or eternal death may not depend. Shall we then, for a single moment, make it a matter of debate what our everlasting condition shall be? If it were a decision between two temporal concerns which you were called upon to make, deliberation might be wisdom, because there might be degrees of comparison between their value, and consequently a doubt as to the predominance of the object, and the prudence of your choice. But the inequalities of created things are levelled when brought into comparison with the things of eternity—the difference of more or less, richer or poorer, prosperity or privation, no longer exists; the distinction is swallowed up when contemplated in the view of endless happiness or endless misery. Here, then, if you hesitate, you have already taken your part; irresolution is decision; deliberation is destruction; you have already resolved.

The hand which now holds the pen dares not denounce anathemas, but trembles as it transcribes the divinely inspired denunciation of the prophet Zephaniah: "The great day of the Lord is near, it is near, it hasteth greatly; it is the voice of the day of the Lord, when the mighty man shall cry bitterly. That day is a day of wrath; a day of trouble and distress; a day of wasteness and desolation; a day of darkness and gloominess; a day of clouds and thick darkness; a day of the trumpet and alarm!"

The awful ruins of imperial Rome, the still more defaced vestiges of learned Athens, present a deeply touching spectacle of departed glory. Still more affecting is it to contemplate in the study of history on the destruction of Carthage, of Babylon, of Memphis, whose very ruins are no longer to

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be found! How affecting to meditate on ancient Troy, whose very site can no longer be determined! Yet here no wonder mixes with our solemn feeling. All these noble monuments of human grandeur were made of destructible materials; they could not, from their very nature, last forever. But, to a deeply reflecting mind, what is the ruin of temples, towers, palaces, and cities, what is the ruin of "the great globe itself," compared with the destruction of one soul meant for immortality—a soul furnished by its bountiful Creator with all the means for its instruction, sanctification, redemption, and eternal bliss? And what presents the most mournful picture to us, and is in itself the most dreadful aggravation, is that its consciousness cannot be extinguished; the thought of what he might have been will magnify the misery of what he is, a reflection which will accompany and torment the inextinguishable memory through a miserable eternity. Whether in the instance of the rich man, who "in hell lifted up his eyes, being in torment," we might dare believe that some remains of human tenderness for his relatives might survive in a ruined soul; or, whether his anguish was made more bitter, from the reflection, that he had been their corrupter, and therefore dreaded that their punishment might hereafter aggravate his own, we pretend not to say. In any event, it offers a lesson pregnant with instruction. It admonishes every impenitent offender of the dreadful addition that may be made to his own misery, by that corrupt example which has ruined others. And it will be the consummation of his calamity that he can see nothing but justice in his condemnation. For it is worth observing, that the man in the parable brings no accusation against the equity of his sentence. Thus shall every condemned sinner "justify God in his saying, and clear him when he is judged."

But though the anguish of an undone futurity, and the specific nature of the punishment, are exhibited with awful clearness and explicit exactness in the gospel; how wisely has the Holy Spirit, who dictated it, avoided all particulars of that heavenly happiness which we are yet assured will be without measure and without end; whilst the Elysian groves of the pagan, and the paradise of the Mohammedan, have been graphically represented, the former by their poets, the latter in their religious code. The one describes the inhabitants reposing in gloomy bowers in cheerless indolence, with the alternative of a restless activity exercised in contemptible pursuits, and renewing on inferior objects the busy feats in which they had delighted here below! The heroes who

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during life had slaughtered men, make war on beasts! The mighty warriors, who had made the earth to tremble, condescend in heaven to tame horses! The departed Mussulman receives *his* celestial rewards in scenes of revelry and banquets of voluptuousness! What gratifications for an immaterial, immortal spirit!

The whole scheme of future happiness exhibited in these two systems, is a preposterous provision for the perishable part of man, to the entire exclusion of the immortal principle; both schemes stand in direct opposition to the laws of infinite wisdom, and the express word of Scripture. Both intimate as if the body were the part of our nature which is to exist after death, while the soul is the portion which is to be extinguished. Of a spiritual heaven, neither the obsolete mythology, nor the existing Koran, affords the slightest intimation.

The Scripture views of heaven are given rather to quicken faith than to gratify curiosity. There the appropriate promises to spiritual beings are purely spiritual. It is enough for believers to know that they shall be forever with the Lord; and though it doth not yet appear what we shall be, yet we know that when he shall appear, we shall be like him. In the vision of the Supreme Good, there must be supreme felicity. Our capacities of knowledge and happiness shall be commensurate with our duration. On earth, part of our enjoyment—a most fallacious part—consists in framing new objects for our wishes; in heaven there shall remain in us no such disquieting desires, for all which *can* be found we shall find in God. We shall not know our Redeemer by the hearing of the ear, but we shall see him as he is; our knowledge, therefore, will be clear, because it will be intuitive.

It is a glorious part of the promised bliss, that the book of prophecy shall be realized; the book of providence displayed, every mysterious dispensation unfolded, not by conjecture, but by vision. In the grand general view of revelation, minute description would be below our ideas; circumstantial details would be disparaging; they would debase what they pretend to exalt. We cannot conceive the blessings prepared for us, until he who has prepared reveal them.

If, indeed, the blessedness of the eternal world could be described, new faculties must be given us to comprehend it. If it could be conceived, its glories would be lowered, and our admiring wonder diminished. The wealth that can be counted has bounds; the blessings that can be calculated have limits. We now rejoice in the expectation of happiness inconceivable. To have conveyed it to our full apprehension, our con-

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ceptions of it must then be taken from something with which we are already acquainted, and we should be sure to depreciate the value of things unseen by a comparison with even the best of the things which are seen. In short, if the state of heaven were attempted to be let down to human intelligence, it would be far inferior to the glorious but indistinct glimpses which we now catch from the oracles of God, of joy unspeakable, and full of glory. What Christian does not exult in that grand outline of unknown, unimagined, yet consummate bliss—In THY presence is the fulness of joy, and at *thy* right hand are pleasures for evermore?

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